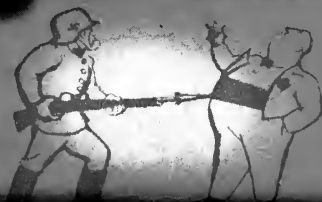


There's No Front Like Home



**ROBERT
M. YODER**

A riotously funny handbook on how to survive though civilian.

There's No Front Like Home

BY ROBERT M. YODER

'Don't be surprised if the next maid you meet wears a cigar. It's ME!' says Yoder, charmed by the vision of mink coats for his afternoon off, and eager young matrons to wait on him.

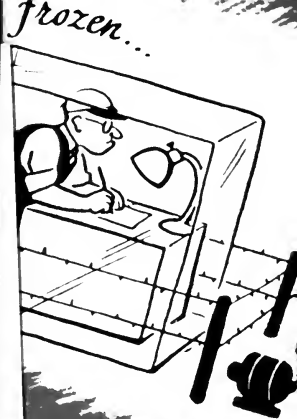
This is the 'My Day' of Mr. and Mrs. America — a merry commentary on the civilian in wartime. Yoder, the prophet of peacetime pleasure, the wag of the city room, and the satirist of the drawing room, writes for the *Chicago Daily News* a column which he describes as 'venerable though corny.' Yoder is neither. 'I am,' he laughs modestly, 'only what any other Ideal American Boy could be if he, too, had curly hair and a C card.'

Jacket and end paper by Alain



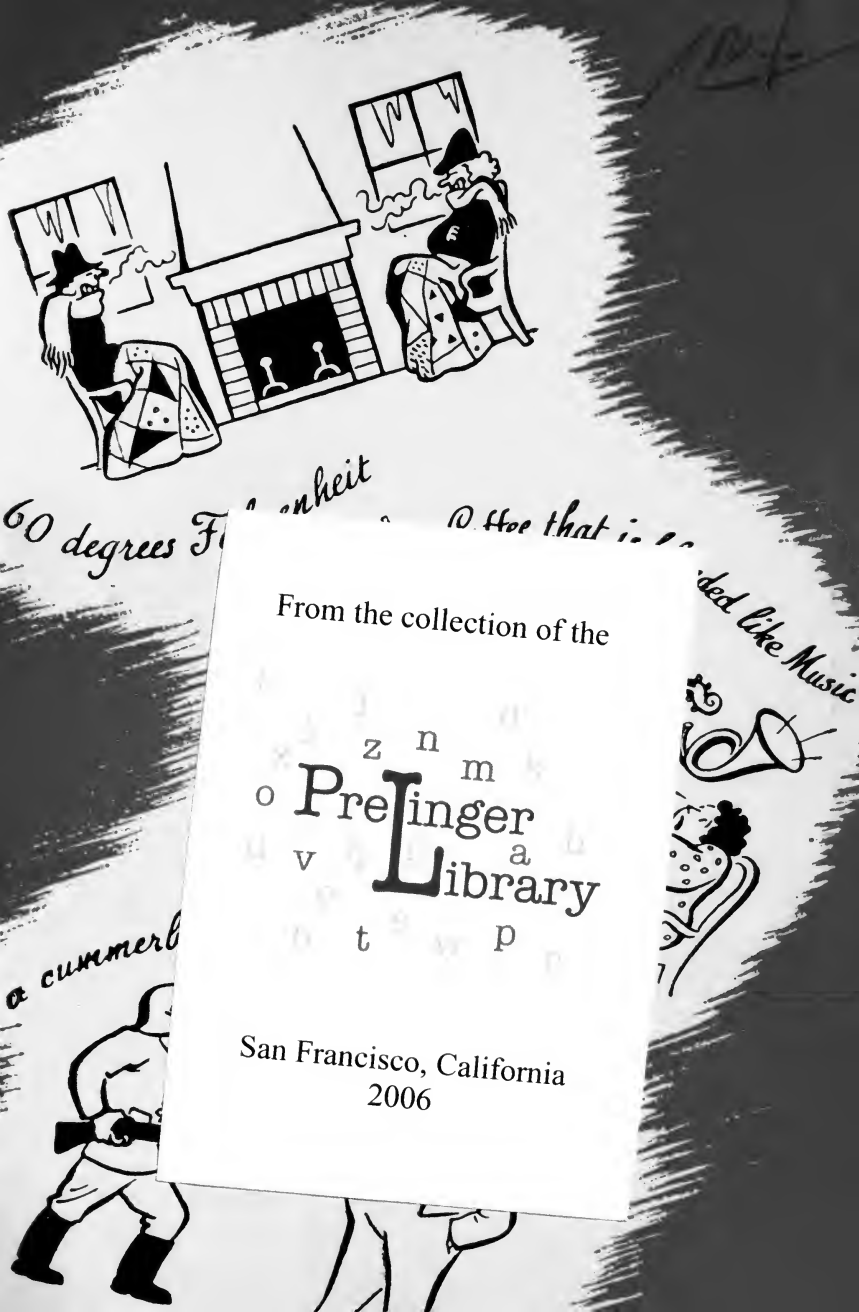
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There's No Front Like Home

With best wishes
for your "New York"
trip - Ray and Helma Wemhauer

May 26 - 1944

A bit of light reading
and something to "nibble"
are guaranteed to give
complete relaxation
so here's how

There's No Front Like Home



by
Robert M. Yoder

Endpapers by Alain

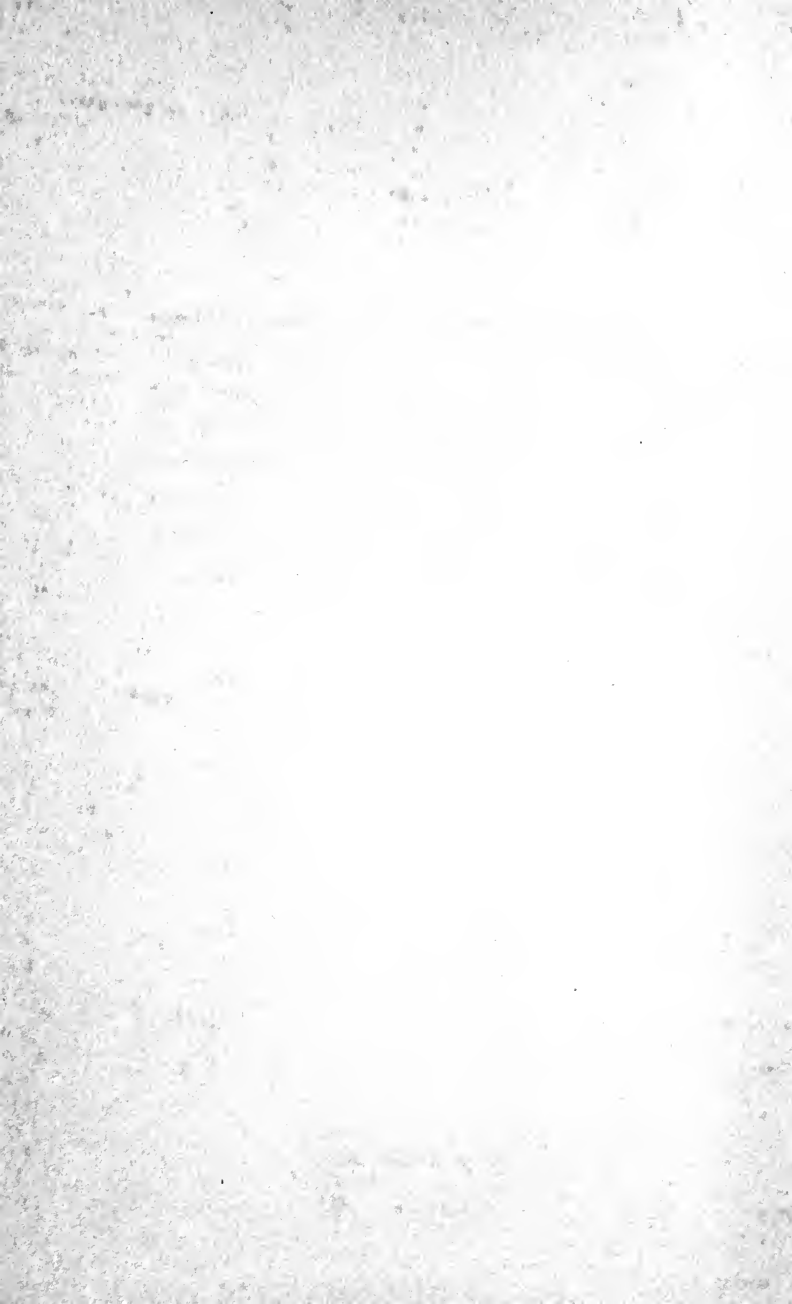
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The Riverside Press Cambridge

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THIS BOOK OR PARTS THEREOF IN ANY FORM

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE • MASSACHUSETTS
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

This is a partial account of a side of the war that has not been heroic, but has a certain confusing charm all its own — the civilian side. It is dedicated to all cash customers who are Rationed and Frozen; who are or have been Overage, Non-essential, or Non-deferrable; who have found themselves 1-A, 2-B, or 3-A, going on 4-F; whose Victory Gardens didn't grow much, and who don't rate anything more than an A card.



Grateful acknowledgment is made to *The Chicago Daily News* for permission to reprint some of the material included in this book.



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There's No Front Like Home



Drop that Raise!

FOR MANY, the hollowest laugh of the civilian side of this war came the day it was announced that we were Frozen. From that moment hence, it became illegal for anyone to lure us from our job by the offer of a better one, nor could our loving employers give us a raise. To pay more money was no longer merely contrary to the boss's every instinct, it was now contrary to federal law.

This, if it had any connection with reality, would be wonderful. Here you go along for years, feeling non-essential, irrelevant, and immaterial, feeling that not even the Missing Persons Bureau would care if you disappeared from the Missing Persons Bureau. And then it turns out you are so valuable they do not stop at putting a little electrified barbed wire around you, or stopping payment on your pay check, but pass a special law warning off any bounder who would lure you from your regular place of employment. It puts thousands of us under a special protection formerly accorded only to crown jewels, Presidents, and sixteen-year-old daughters. The cad who tries to pay *us* more money is lucky if he doesn't end up in jail.

As I get it, this is a mighty serious thing. This is not a tort, like smashing a fender. It is not something that can be excused, like stealing a cow. The employer who makes a pass at us might just as well be dealing in hot cars or smuggled gems. We are dynamite. To offer us another job is like making love to the United States Marshal's daughter.

We have been stepchildren, in the past, and there have been times when we thought our employers didn't care whether we lived or died, as long as we died off the premises. Far from shielding us from the advances of rivals, it seemed likely the boss was only waiting for the next employers' meeting for an agreement to close the whole department. In our new status, we are theoretically in such demand that it may be necessary to call out the troops. Lovesick employers have been warned off the property. I guess they could send flowers or candy, or a bottle of some delicate scent, preferably from Kentucky, but that's all they can hope for. I thought of putting a sign on my desk, saying, 'You may Look, But Do Not Touch.' Or perhaps the single, dismissive word: 'Taken.' Taken every pay day, I would have said before.

This spell of sweet reasonableness, this economic Leap Year, may not last. The bosses may not love us in December as they do in May. Even so, it is quite a sight while it lasts. The help-wanted ads display a solicitude for the help's happiness that is beautiful to see. Do you remember when employers were sometimes a little peremptory, with a tendency to kick you downstairs? A trifle brusque, a touch autocratic? With an occasional downright heel? They have vanished. The men in charge of hiring now include some of the sweetest natures since Mother Machree.

Here is an ad that promises 'friendly atmosphere,' and if you think that is good, have a look at the next one. In this little Eden there is, of necessity, some supervision. But the supervision is at all times 'kind, understanding, and patient.' I'm as hypersensitive as the next one, but I couldn't ask better treatment than that. As a matter of fact, Damon couldn't ask better treatment than that from Pythias.

And look at this line: 'Advancement assured.' It seems only yesterday that advancement was by no means assured, but was frowned upon as contrary to policy. The man who walked in and asked for a better job was looked upon as a whiner. Advancement was anything but assured; it was somewhere between implausible and grounds for instantaneous dismissal.

It may be, of course, that what the authors of these ads regard as kindly treatment is not the tender concern the words suggest. It may be that these enlightened firms have an unenlightened paymaster, who is an old-fashioned type, and does not believe in coddling the help by giving them money. There were, before this Golden Era of the working man, a number of executives who could send supplicants away suffering from chill and exposure.

Here is an ad calling for a porter. He is assured that working conditions will not merely be good, which is mediocre, these days, but will be 'ideal.' This side of Paradise, you can't ask nicer working conditions than that. The man who undertakes this responsibility is going to have 'day work only,' and he is promised 'liberal rest periods' when Utopia begins to pall. Way back there a year or so ago, there were business organizations in which an employee was allowed to feel somewhere

between a permitted trespasser, a squatter, and a poor relation. Now he is a treasure and a prize, and we stress the easy-going nature of the men you will have to work for. Our foreman is a butter-hearted old softie, and our superintendent goes around with a pocketful of sugar cookies.

Comes the revolution, it'll be too late.

Come Live with Me, and Be My Maid

ANOTHER THING poetry-lovers shouldn't miss is the ads for a maid.' Did I say ads? These are Valentines. If you call at one pleasant Chicago home some evening soon and are greeted by a saucy new maid who seems slightly knobby in the knees and could use a shave, it will be the undersigned. What is coaxing me to a career as a domestic is an ad that began 'This Is Your Home.'

'Do you want surroundings where cheerfulness and friendliness prevail — a place you can make your home?' it asked.

'We have seven lovely newly decorated rooms, including one for you, with private bath and radio. Our neighborhood is clean and quiet; transportation is good.

'We are a congenial family of two adults and two school-children, and we need you for household duties and to help with the cooking. No windows. No laundry. White or colored equally accepted if neat, reliable, and competent. Stay or go.'

Go? Who would leave a Blue Heaven like that?

Note the working conditions. The house is newly decorated, the neighborhood is clean, the family promises to be congenial. The maid won't have to wash any

windows, she won't have to do any laundry. She is needed for household duties, which we may presume means a little occasional sweeping and dusting, and she may be asked to cook — no, to help with cooking.

There is a bright new room awaiting her, but even there, there is nothing compulsory about it. Should these seven lovely newly decorated rooms begin to seem inadequate, she can go home. And in case she does, there is good transportation. Short of promising to carry her to the bus station piggyback, it is hard to see how anyone can top it.

What clinched the deal with me, however, was the reference to salary. In small type, the ad said that the maid who took this job would receive 'top pay.' In case that wasn't clear, there was next a line of caps, which said, 'You name the salary.'

Now mind you, I don't say the work isn't hard, I don't say good maids aren't hard to find. I just say that a job where you name your own salary is a better deal than some male employees I know are getting from the flinty-hearted parties they work for now.

Of course, I would have to lay down one or two small conditions. In the first place, I would expect them to get the Fascists out of the State Department, and in the second, I may need the use of the living room a couple of nights a week for poker parties. But if these requests are granted, then they got themselves a new maid. If you ring the bell, and a modish though somewhat angular chick comes to let you in, perhaps with a light Havana clamped between those pearly choppers, don't crack.

I might say, in conclusion, that the ad I found so inviting was stiff and cold compared to some that came

the next day or so. Here is one that does not begin with a description of the house, but the grounds. This little pleasure-dome is not merely nicely located but is set like a gem. 'Located in a beautiful private park near the lake,' the ad says, 'with all transportation handy.' This clearly is the house that tenants have hunted for years. Does it have a yard? Hell, friends, this one has a park.

Now we get to the atmosphere of the home, which could be bad, even in a castle in a park by the lake. How is the atmosphere here? You guessed it — symphonic. It is 'cheerful, friendly, cooperative.' That is all you could ask of a family to marry into, let alone work for.

There are drawbacks, of course, as with every job. The place has people in it. Two adults, and two school-girls. But let us forget these four flies in an otherwise perfect ointment, and get on to the maid's duties. 'We need you,' the ad whispers low, 'for plain cooking, and to help maintain a lovely, newly decorated apartment-sized house.'

I forgot to say that the girl who settles in this pavilion in the park by the lake can name her own salary. That seems to be taken for granted, even when she is working in a spot that would have a Nature-lover far too pleased to do anything but admire the view. 'Can Name Own Salary.' Would someone did the same for me, love!

In view of these complexities, I hope Mr. Morgenthau will excuse my report on Form 1096. That was directed specially at the employers of domestics, and was designed to keep the maid from concealing payment. The interesting dilemma came in saying what board and room were worth.

I don't know how things are in your house, Henry, but in mine, it is darned hard to say what the board is worth. Suppose I say the food is very good indeed. Worth three dollars a day at the very least. That would add six or seven hundred dollars to the hired girl's income, and frankly, she wouldn't agree. If she thought she was paying that much for the kind of meals she gets in our house, she would bring her lunch.

On the other hand, I couldn't very well take the stand that the food is no good. She cooks it herself.

The same with the room. I could figure out what this room costs me, on the basis of floor space, but it certainly isn't worth that much to the maid. She wouldn't pay half that much for it, and nobody else would, either. It comes down to this: What is the fair value of a room if it is no good, but the only room available?

It seemed to make a difference, too, whether the maid was on duty around the clock or had her evenings off. One of the stories from Washington used the phrase 'On twenty-four-hour call.' It must be beautiful in Washington. I take it this covers the case where the girl sleeps in, and is always on duty, but you don't wake her unless you have to, because if you did, she would blow the joint as soon as she could get her clothes on. 'Twenty-four-hour call' is where the family goes around on tiptoe for fear they will wake her.

The first I heard of this Form, it was due in four days. I had my report in the mail when I got what I had been waiting for — an expert opinion, 'What board and room are worth,' said a Washington dispatch, quoting a spokesman of the Internal Revenue Bureau, 'would have to be determined according to what the employee would expect to pay for similar accommodations in the

same neighborhood.' She wouldn't have lived in the same neighborhood, Henry, except as a matter of duty, and she certainly wouldn't have expected to pay. If the report seems to suggest that she is an Empress we are starving to death, I hope you will understand. The situation was pretty well confused to begin with, and, if I may say so, you didn't help it any.

We Must Cut Down

IF YOU DROP IN on the Harrison Williamses of New York and the butler looks a little strange, for Heaven's sake don't make any cracks about it, for that is Harrison's valet. Using the valet for double duty that way is one of the ways in which the Williamses are economizing. I read about this in the New York *World-Telegram*, in a series called 'What has become of the rich?'

The story by no means says that Harrison is hard up. In fact, there is some mention of his once having a hundred million dollars, and nothing to suggest that Harry doesn't still have some or all of this to fall back on if things get really tough. On the other hand, this was in 1942, when the future of millionaires was frankly uncertain, and both Hal and Mrs. Williams had prudently determined to cut down. As Mrs. Williams put it to the *World-Telegram's* reporter, they have trimmed their sails.

I pass this information along so you can act accordingly. You will have to watch your step every inch of the way, if you don't want to say something embarrassing, for doing without a butler is only one of several changes the Williamses have made.

One thing you ought to know is that Mrs. Williams has put her jewels in storage, so as to save insurance. Another is that the family is living on only two floors of its Park Avenue house, everything else having been closed off. Be on guard against making any remarks about the size of the flat, or saying that the hostess looks a little bleak without her diamonds. Ladies and gents of real breeding, I mean, will button up their lip and do nothing to call attention to these reduced circumstances.

Or if it is too apparent to be overlooked, then I would make some lighthearted reference to it and try to pass the whole thing off as a joke. 'How clever not to wear your emeralds,' you might say. 'How did you ever get rid of them?' Or if the flat seems more than a little cramped, you could make some comment about the place being cozy and easy to take care of. 'I have often thought of closing everything but two or three floors of my own place,' you might say. 'Those damn stairs are killing my feet.'

Another economy Mrs. Williams is making, the story says, is to wear dark clothes, which don't soil so easily, and to wear small hats, for, she says, a girl practically has to use a limousine to wear a big hat successfully. She is using taxis, instead, and wherever she goes, arranges to walk one way. Mrs. Williams, as I get it, is doing all her own walking.

Still another money-saver comes in converting the formal dining room into a small, informal dining room, also used as a living room. Personally, I feel this is a little like eating in the kitchen, but I certainly will never mention it, and hope you will do the same.

Naturally, as you file into this overcrowded little nook

for dinner, you can't very well pretend no changes have been made. Perhaps the kindest thing to do is to show you can unbend and enter into the spirit of the thing. 'Harrison, old boy,' you might say, 'do you mind if I blow my soup?' Just how you dress, to dine in such Spartan surroundings as a converted formal dining room, I am not sure. To avoid embarrassment, and put the Williamses at their ease, I intend to wear a white tie, but go barefoot.

What about the combined valet and butler? Well, that is a little frugal, and there will be those who feel the Williamses are pinching the pennies, but what of it? Why shouldn't a man's valet answer the door? A man's a man for all that. These are changing times, and instead of jeering at the rugged simplicity of this Park Avenue town house, a lot of us might better emulate it. The Williamses will lose some of their fair-weather friends, no doubt. But Plain Harrison, as I call him, can always count on me.

After hearing of belt-tightening like that, it was not surprising to read, as the season of 1942-43 drew on, that the Bath and Tennis Club of Palm Beach had converted to war. This was in a story telling how war's grim hand had changed Palm Beach almost beyond recognition. The club, it said, was keeping chickens.

'The hens,' the story said, 'are housed in batteries, and never see the eggs they lay — they drop immediately into a basket beneath the hens.' Just doing their duty with no thought of glory, like the good little soldiers that they are, is the clear suggestion there. After this, I never want to hear the idle rich called idle again.

Society-page dispatches from such playgrounds, if you can properly call an egg factory like the Bath and

Tennis Club a playground, always seem a little torn between saying that life is very pleasant there and that war has taken all the fun out of having a good time, which, for all I know, might be right. Certainly I would expect reduced rates, for the same communiqué spoken of earlier noted a somewhat striking wartime shortage in Palm Beach, that of royalty. Just where royalty went to, it didn't say, but it did say that titled folk had all but disappeared, 'leaving only a few noble personages clinging to the guesthouses of the big estates.' Then came a line that should forever dispel any idea that royalty can't adjust to new conditions. 'Several,' it said, meaning several of the royal personages, 'have dropped their titles.'

Only for the duration, it may be, only pending a decision on the second war for democracy; but I call that roughing it. Even so, I am not going to waste any money in a playground so hard hit by war that royalty slops around with its titles off.

The goldfish were having a good time, though; yes, the goldfish. After the war, if ever you wonder where on earth to spend the winter that the goldfish would like, too, then this is the spot. Don't sneer that one place is about like another to a goldfish. Cast a startled eye, instead, on the following vignette from life on the Society Front:

'One of the divertissements given before the opening of the season was a birthday party for a cairn terrier. . . . It was attended by a duck, a cat, a Spitz dog, a Pekingese, and a pair of goldfish.'

With divertissements like that going on, and even before the official opening of the divertissement season, it is pretty plain that winter resort life is not going to

be entirely dull, war or no war, at least for the better class of pets. Tell me, what kind of revel did the owner of those madcap goldfish throw in return? It sounds like the start of the most brilliant goldfish social season in years. I would also like to know more about the party that started this, the one for the cairn terrier. Informal, I suppose?

By the fall of 1943, judging from another society-page dispatch, the more desirable class of dogs were spending the autumn at Hot Springs, Virginia. And in spite of the war, there was plenty of excitement.

'Last year,' the story says, 'there were sixty-five dogs registered at the Homestead, and this year there are even more. There are five dogs in the boxer class alone, and I don't know how many pekes. Not a day without a first-class dog fight on the casino lawn. . . .'

The account adds that along with fights there are 'innumerable growling and yippings,' which I'll bet is right, too, for when you get sixty or seventy dogs together, oh boy! There's likely to be a growling any moment, or at the very least, a yipping.

'The season opened,' the story went on, 'with the most terrific dog fight in the hotel lobby, where Mrs. Smith of Chicago appeared from her cottage with a pet white English Bull. Mrs. Brown of Palm Beach was strolling along with her pet boxer, and en passant, addressed a few kind words to the Smith dog. Suddenly the boxer leaped upon the bulldog from the rear and tried to kill him. It took about a dozen strong men to quell this fight. . . .'

They quelled it, all right, apparently, but not a bit too soon.

'Neither of the participants was much damaged,' the

account continued, 'but Mrs. H — fell out of a wheel chair in horror at the spectacle, and Mrs. Smith in struggling to save her dog, lamed a foot. . . . The Smiths have cut short their stay and are going home today owing to war conditions. They had a cottage on the mountain road, and during the spring rains, the roof leaked, and there was nobody to mend it. Then ceilings fell, and that isn't so amusing.'

'Isn't so amusing' is a mighty brave way of putting it, but the fact is, what we have here is a picture of life in the raw, of men and women struggling with Nature at its darndest. Substitute the Pacific Ocean for that leak in the roof and this is just like Joseph Conrad, or perhaps I am thinking of Herman Melville. Things have come to a pretty pass when a woman taking her dog for a stroll in the very lobby of her hotel can't address a kind word to someone else's dog without precipitating a major engagement. To have the roof leak, the same season, is simply anti-climactic.

I wouldn't want you to get the impression that all the roofs leak at Hot Springs, or that all the dogs are rowdy. There are nicer dogs there, it is pleasant to report. 'The most admired bowwow in the hotel,' this story says, 'is a small half-grown puppy, an Irish terrier called Casey Jones. He is a merry little doggie and skips about in harness with his father.'

That is the picture I prefer to keep, but it does no good to pretend that the other sort of thing doesn't happen. I just thought you would like to know, en passant.

When Life Comes in the Door

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER was something of a nuisance in his way, but compared to the lad who came to call on the Stanton family of Mansfield, Ohio, he was no trouble at all. The Stantons' visitor was a photographer from *Life* magazine, making a human document entitled 'Life Calls on an American Family at War.' Unless some of the scenes were posed, which I would never believe for a minute, this caller like to never left.

He was with Papa Stanton when Mr. Stanton gave a pint of blood for the Red Cross, he watched Ralph, Jr., practice first aid, and he was out in the kitchen with the colored maid, Myrtle, for pictorial history of Myrtle typically saving a typical tin can. Those who don't get around much, and never watched anyone saving a tin can, may want a copy of this instructive though somewhat static picture scoop and undoubtedly can secure them by writing *Life's* back-number department.

The omnipresent cameraman tagged along when Mr. and Mrs. Stanton got out their bikes, for a spot of tire-conserving bicycle riding, he surprised young Davey Stanton in the act of hauling old newspapers on Davey's little red wagon, and when Mr. Stanton went up to the attic to get an old stove, for the scrap drive, or possibly

just to get a little privacy, the photographer was up there, too.

He seems to have hung around while Ralph, Jr., gave a party, and, with the same remarkable good luck, managed to snap young Ralph as the lad was slipping a typical kiss to Nancy Grimm, one of the guests. He couldn't have stayed less than a week, for here he is, still here, when Mr. and Mrs. Stanton have some friends in on Saturday night for an evening of bridge and musical chairs. Anyone wondering how a typical wartime American foursome looks while playing bridge couldn't ask a clearer view, I'll say that, and there was the same authentic look about the picture illustrating how these typical Americans played musical chairs. It was either an authentic view of men and women playing musical chairs or else things at the Stantons' are mighty crowded.

Life's man was right on the spot to catch son John sewing a button on a shirt, and was in the kitchen one night when Davey and his sister Phyllis washed the dishes. He went shopping with Mrs. Stanton, and even tailed her to the beauty parlor. The kids may have thought to ditch him by going to choir rehearsal at the First Presbyterian Church, but if so, their little ruse didn't work. The cameraman not only went along, capturing a fine shot of choir rehearsal in full tilt, but what's more, went back to the Stantons' after it was over.

For when Mrs. Stanton decided to give her youngest son a bath, there was *The Eye*, again, making a front-line shot of the bathroom. Snatching a few winks of sleep, he seems to have been waiting the next morning when Mr. Stanton and Ralph, Jr., went in to shave. And he was not only lurking but listening, for he overhears Phyllis and David quarreling over priority. 'You certainly took your time,' Phyllis is quoted as saying.

'Well, I had to get clean, didn't I?' says her kid brother, which pretty well tells you what this typical wartime kid brother was doing in the bathroom, and even more strongly tells you that when *Life* comes in the door, privacy flies out the window.

Along came Sunday morning, and we are still at the Stantons', for the photog has snapped a picture of the Stanton children at breakfast. Along comes Sunday afternoon, and he makes a shot of Mr. Stanton taking a Sunday afternoon nap. Thoroughly typical, too.

Like the picture of Myrtle holding the tin can, the blueprint of a nap was nice and simple. Many a reader, and even refugees, could learn to do the same simply by studying that photograph.

One of the last pictures in the layout shows the two older Stanton boys and their father grouped about a table in earnest discussion. 'Planning a garden' is how the cutlines explain this conference. This is admirable, of course, but disappointing. I had hoped they were cooking up a scheme to get the photographer out of the house and get back to normalcy.

It will be some little time before I figure out how the Stantons' wartime bathing differs from the peacetime procedure, or that of a neutral, but with the picture magazines providing illustrated advice even on how to gather about a table, I feel a little freer to dream about another picture I saw, one of Miss Sylvia Opert, of the movies. The picture, appearing in my newspaper, says that Miss Opert scorns an alarm clock and is wakened by her private oriole. This was the first time I ever heard of Miss Opert, and the last, too, for that matter, but it was astonishment at first sight.

The cutlines telling about this say that Miss Opert, who appears in such and such a movie, 'is aroused from beauty sleep by oriole, Jimmy, her feathered alarm clock.' And forever to confound the skeptical, sure enough, there is a picture of Miss Opert or a mighty tasty impostress, and she is sitting up in bed, aroused, beautiful, and holding on her finger a somewhat grumpy-looking oriole.

This is easily the most ladylike thing I ever heard of; it makes taking milk baths sound like a dip in the horse-trough, it makes sleeping on satin sheets seem tomboyish. No harsh metallic scream from an alarm clock or a telephone awakes my Sylvia; she is brought out of the nightly coma by the pure liquid strains of bird song. Note the type of bird song, too: a few bars from an oriole, no less, which I take it is about as delicate as it comes. A few cheeps from a well-modulated bluebird would be nice, perhaps, or maybe a duet by muted larks, but this is nicer. And I am only guessing when I assume that Miss Opert's feathered alarm clock arouses her with song. He may fly in without a sound and toss a drop of dew in that pretty kisser, or slug her with a rose petal.

However he does it, here is daintiness compounded; here is dainty femininity till hell won't hold it. Until I find a girl so girlish that she is awakened by a pet butterfly, or the gentle crash of a bursting bud, then Miss Opert is my ideal and dream girl. She makes all other members of her sex seem coarse, crude, and unromantic; in fact, she makes all her sister females seem like transcontinental truck-drivers.

Here is a maid who is one with the birds and the bees and the flowers, a lass to whose finger the birds fly with-

out the slightest fear or hesitancy, carrying wire-clippers in case the screens are in. To find a shy woodland creature like Miss Opert in Hollywood is like finding a violet growing on the city pave. As a matter of fact, it is a little disturbing, too, and I hate to think of Sylvia in those citified and somewhat honky-tonk surroundings. For one thing, I shudder to think of the rough characters she may be thrown into contact with there, like press agents and photographers, for instance, who got no regard for a girl's privacy, but will walk right in while a girl is being waked by her pet oriole. Hollywood is no place for a child of Nature like that. Come away, Sylvia, come to the dells and the glades, come to the woods, dear.

That Jimmy, the little dandy reliable feathered alarm clock — he's quite a type himself. Cynics privileged to see this same photograph will sneer that he is stuffed, but I won't. I not only believe in Jimmy, but would enjoy knowing more about him and his interesting line of work, even to the extent of making his rounds with him some A.M.

Does he wake others, too, or work exclusively for Miss Opert? What does he do after she says, 'All right, all right, I'm awake' — does he bring her an order of nectar? Does he come around at evening, when it is time to go beddy-bye, and cover her over with leaves? And when Jimmy wings around in the morning, does he sing something special or just make like an oriole? How does he get in, and if Miss Opert herself lets him in, how is she on identifying bird calls, pretty sharp?

If he has extra time, what would the Feathered Alarm Clock charge to go around and bite Walt Disney? And is he the oriole that sometimes writes Louella Parsons' column?

Taxes will Beat the Axis

or, I'm a Little Beat Myself

EVERY TIME Mr. Morgenthau makes a statement in Washington about his taxes, there is a note of melancholy and self-pity I find very touching. Measures he has taken are, he seems to feel, miserable and inadequate, hardly more than stopgaps, only a beginning. Mr. Morgenthau gives the impression he thinks his taxes are poor things at best, nowhere near recapturing the amount of money they should, and I thought it might give him surcease to hear from a perfect victim, a citizen on whom every measure he takes works like a charm. I refer, Mr. Morgenthau, sir, as usual, to me.

Mr. Morgenthau hasn't invented a tax yet that didn't score a bull's-eye on me. Every time he adds a surtax or reduces a deduction, that's me all over, Henry; and every time he ups the tax for a man with two children, it fits me like a glove. You'd think it was meant for me, Hank, and I'm getting a little fed up with it, too, but don't intend to mention it until after the war.

The same with every levy of every sort. I don't even have to read the tax stories. Every time one of them appears, I know it is going to raise the taxes on precisely

what I buy or use, and that would be true if I were plotting to buy a giraffe. In fact, Mr. Morgenthau, you could tax me more, and undoubtedly will, but you couldn't tax me more accurately if you read my mail. I wish you did, too, as it would give you an inkling of how the other half lives.

I can say the same thing about the anti-inflationary measures. The gentlemen in charge of this fight seem haunted by the fear that nothing they have yet done will prevent the citizens from going on spending sprees and squandering money in wild, competitive bidding for articles that are rare and growing rarer. When Leon Henderson was in command, he was haunted by seventeen billion dollars in runaway money that was abroad in the land like a grim presence. Nothing he did, Mr. Henderson used to moan, would slay this monster, or even pink him, and sterner, more drastic methods would have to be found at once.

Well, gents, your efforts to hold down wages and prevent inflationary spending, ineffectual as they seem to you in moments of depression, have worked just peachy in my case. It's been months since I have gone out throwing money around. In fact, if I didn't know this was a dangerous boom, I'd think times were getting harder and harder.

As for your wildcat seventeen billion dollars, Leon, it hasn't showed up in my house even yet (Here, kitty!). And my confidence in Mr. Morgenthau's taxes has been unbounded ever since the day, back in 1942, when he proposed a five-dollar tax on being taxed, a five-dollar charge for paying the income tax. Maybe I'm biased, but I follow the tax news with all the unflagging interest

of a rabbit reading the Journal of the Associated Shotgun Manufacturers, and I've never, no, I've never, heard the likes of that. With schemes like that up his sleeve, Mr. Morgenthau can't fail.

The idea stems from the belief that paying taxes is a privilege, which it certainly is, for the duration (and not one second longer). But Mr. Morgenthau developed that. He heaped privilege on privilege. If it had been a pleasure before, he would make it a delight.

Nothing came of this, and I never did hear how the tax was to be imposed. Presumably there would simply be a line at the bottom of the blank, saying, 'Now add five dollars for nothing.' Others had thought of raising the income tax, but, as far as I know, this was the first time anyone had considered charging an admission price. It is an avenue of great promise. It could lead to a tax on deductions, a small tax on exemptions, and eventually, a tax on not paying more taxes.

The only criticism of Mr. Morgenthau's taxes is that they are sometimes a little advanced. Take that mathematical treat, the Victory Tax. The old-fashioned income tax was never difficult to figure out, in spite of all the corny jokes about it, but only difficult to meet. But the Victory Tax, as first submitted to a befuddled public, combined war bond purchases, insurance premiums, and the reduction of outstanding indebtedness into one of the nicest bits of homework you have seen since you had trouble with geometry.

A part of this, or possibly all, was absorbed when the pay-go taxes came along, and I am in hopes nothing more will be said about it, for this little teaser included an invisible though variable postdated refund provision that I will never be able to figure out, unless the butler

did it. A portion of the tax was to accumulate in Washington and be returned to you after the war, unless you elected to make use of this unseen hoard before then.

In one explanatory newspaper story, the case was cited of a man who paid fifty dollars in life insurance premiums, and when computing his regular income tax, held back that fifty dollars, which sounds very nice indeed, as it gives him another deduction. The trouble is, however, that he was setting this fifty dollars off against his postwar Victory Tax refund. Why he would want to subtract fifty dollars he had paid out, with great mental anguish, from one hundred dollars he had coming after the war, makes a mighty zesty little problem. Taxes like that can make those long winter evenings fairly fly.

This same open-handed taxpayer paid four hundred dollars in bills. Just where he got credit like that, the story didn't say, but he did, anyway, and now he paid. Well, that enabled him to wipe out the entire refund he had expected to get from the Victory Tax, and seemed to be regarded as a mighty shrewd stroke of business. It looks to me as if he is out four hundred dollars plus a refund, but apparently that is all to the good. The only fellow whose rôle I could dope out was that of the gent who got the four hundred dollars. I clung to that.

Now that is an ingenious tax, all right, and should do everything for a nation but cure absenteeism and the mounting divorce rate. At one fell swoop, it collects money, prevents inflation, encourages the purchase of war bonds, pats the back of men who pay their bills (or at least, who owe bills) and rewards those responsible souls who keep their insurance paid up. A tax like that should do wonders for a nation's moral fiber and could

only do more if there were an additional refund for those who don't smoke until they are twenty-one and who love their mothers.

But isn't it a little tough? Am I behind the class, or is a five per cent pay-roll deduction with a partially or occasionally re-deductible refund — isn't that a little recondite? My own math stopped, as I remember it, at the formula for computing the area of a growing cow. If I could figure out problems such as are posed by the Victory Tax, I would be out earning twice as much.

Next came the pay-go taxes with the forgiveness principle. Forgiveness seemed a little mysterious at first, but cleared fast enough. Apparently they had forgiven us right in the teeth. They had forgiven us full in the pants. The forgiveness was more in spirit than in fact; it was invisible and painless; it was a kiss in the dark. It meant that on or about July 1, 1942, while you might be in something of a jam with the creditors, you were aces all around with the Treasury Department. Except, of course, for twenty-five per cent. You were all paid up for 1942, except for the twenty-five per cent that was not forgiven. Personally, I found it a little hard to know just how to feel on July 1. While not exactly as happy as a lark, a taxpayer should have been seventy-five per cent as happy as a lark, or, to put it more precisely, as happy as a lark that owes money.

One clear-cut result was to make September 15 a date that takes its place right alongside March 15 as a day of mental turmoil and nervous indigestion. That day the taxpayer files an estimated return (and aren't they all?) to see how pay-go taxes were working out. If he ends up owing the government money, he pays half on September 15 and half on December 15, and a happy Christmas to *you*, too, I'm sure.

But the big day was still ahead — March 15. Instead of having one tax return to fill out, as in the complicated old system of the past, the taxpayer would now have three. First, a final return for the year that's past, with a check for the difference if he hadn't paid quite enough. Then an estimate of his earnings in the coming year. And half the unforgiven phase of the old taxes. Heigh ho, what a feast of mathematics, what a carnival of juggling, what a treat for the right and left brain lobes! All I'd ask on a day like that is the aspirin concession.

Fortunately, no taxpayer need puzzle these intricate problems out by himself. There are books you can buy on the subject, costing from twenty-five cents to a dollar and adding a good fifty dollars to your final return.

The last one of these handy manuals this book-lover bought told exactly how to compute your tax for the year 1942. While it provided only three or four two-bit ideas for new deductions, it was a remarkably complete little treatise, including everything but a confession of judgment and a plea of guilty. And it was worth the money if only to see how the other half lives.

There was a fascinating table, for instance, telling exactly what to do with government bonds of every variety, from RFC 1 per cent notes, Series S, to 4 per cent Alaska Railroad retirement bonds. Possibly a hundred types of this delightful paper were listed, according to what was taxable and what was not, and there was some equally good stuff about the interest from securities containing a tax-free covenant. Advice like this means getting the Governments all down and sorting them out, but darned if I don't think it's worth it.

There is usually another excellent section covering 'the two year carryback of net operating losses,' which will seem an eminently fair and even tolerant provision, but like so many eminently fair provisions, does not apply to me. There is also a lot of good advice for the man who married a wealthy wife. He needs good advice about as much as Lily Pons needs singing lessons, but it's here for him, anyway.

Unless you equip yourself with a textbook of this kind, there are literally dozens of tax problems that might never occur to you at all. Mine tells me for the first time what to do in case a creditor cancels a debt I owe him. Any debt so forgiven, the book makes plain, must be treated as income and included in the year's total take. Just as if the money had rolled in the front door, and a million times more improbable.

There is usually a good list of 173 forms of intake which need not be counted as income at all, and 188 deductions that may be taken by married couples. A remarkable number of these don't apply to me, but it is obvious they must be invaluable to someone. Thus, it is nice to learn that a man can deduct any amounts subtracted from his pay for damaging his employer's property. If you have engaged in any considerable amount of office vandalism, during the year, this is worth knowing. There is also some good news for ambassadors of foreign nations, whose pay, it appears, is not taxable at all. There are equally handy hints, I feel sure, for llama fanciers and Egyptologists. Perhaps the list that serves of most widespread value, however, is the catalogue of things no one may deduct under any circumstances. There is something here for everyone.

It was heartening to learn that soldiers don't have

to consider their meals as compensation, nor the use of the rifle. No such softhearted lenience is shown toward the civilian, however, for if I read my book right, everything but the last cigarette you borrowed must be counted as part of your income, and I am not sure about the cigarette.

And it was discouraging to read that gifts made by a man's loving employer are usually taxable, as this may get employers out of the habit. Nor was it cheering to hear that you can be taxed on any bonus given at the time of dismissal, and on unemployment benefits received while beating the streets looking for a new Legree. Even if you are fired and on the dole, your old Uncle Treasury doesn't forget you, kid. A pound of flesh, however bruised, is the motto in those quarters.

It may be that Mr. Morgenthau would like to hear an average citizen's reaction to his pay-go tax deductions, and if so, will state, Henry, that from the looks of my pay check you can stop worrying about inflation. My check, with the pay-go tax deduction added to the other deductions, is just a sort of negotiable reminder from the pay-roll department, telling of what used to be. In one column it tells me what I am making and in another section it tells me what I am going to get, and Henry, you wouldn't think it was the same fellow. Neither of them is doing very well, either, but one of them is practically a tramp.

It isn't all the fault of the new pay-go deduction, Henry. Deductions have been getting so they make up by far the greatest part of the pay check's reading matter, and the part that is payable, or real, or whatever you like to call it, is hardly more than a footnote. I don't know how it is with the other fellows, Hank, but

the pay check where I work is in two parts, the regular check, which simply says, 'Pay this wight a few coppers so's he won't starve,' and another section devoted exclusively to deductions. These are running a little race, and the outcome never was in doubt. Any day now, I will open my check and get a two-page financial statement plus six cents in stamps. As a matter of fact I am not sure about the stamps. I seem to be working up to a place where pay day will consist of an auditor's report and a pat on the back.

To tell the truth, Henry, I have been a little nervous about this for a long time, figuring that one of these days the office would conclude that it costs too much to do the bookkeeping and that a small fortune could be saved by not issuing me a check at all, probably paying me in subscriptions to the paper. It must take the whole time of a pretty smart girl to figure out if I have anything left over, at the end of the week, and it must be depressing work, too.

So it isn't entirely the fault of your new pay-go tax deduction, Henry, if pay checks like mine look a little tattered, not to say riddled, although I will say this: as deductions go, that new one of yours is a dandy. It really takes hold, Henry, it is a bull's-eye. I thought for a minute that along with being frozen I had been garnished, reduced to the ranks, and perhaps sued for separate maintenance.

You may find, Henry, that the deduction is a little bigger or sharper or tougher than many of the citizens had expected. Apparently your deduction is a percentage of total pay, rather than actual pay. That is, when I figured on fifteen or twenty per cent, I figured that percentage of what the pay check actually pays, whereas

you figured on what the pay check would pay if it had not been seriously, if not fatally, deducted. You figured on the basis of that hypothetical and mythical amount that the checks say a fellow is earning. That figure is purely hearsay with many of us, Henry, pure fiction. It has been years since we were paid what we are earning. In fact, we are trying to work up to it.

One of the papers carried a quotation from you, Mr. Secretary, that I am going to cherish, in the lean months ahead. 'Employees will discover,' you were quoted as saying, 'that something has happened to their pay checks.' You never said a truer word, Henry, and you never said a safer one. I have discovered what happened to mine, and it is not at all hard to explain. Confidentially, it shrinks.

Every time there is a new tax, or a new and sterner tax proposal, the newspapers kindly print tables showing about what each taxpayer will owe. Just run your finger down the proper line, and faint. Reading those tables is a remarkable experience, as refreshing, in its way, as an ice-cold shower. You feel as though you had looked into a mirror and seen a total stranger. You feel as a scrub cow would feel if they had her mixed up with Queen Esterleigh Mordant of DOWDALE THREE, last year's milk-producing champion of the world.

'Who, me?' is the cry from a million lips, as their owners gaze upon the total in mingled despair and greed. There it stands, a sum of money such as you never dreamed of having, a sum that would be a wind-fall if only it were coming in instead of going out. About Ben Adhem, when he found his name led all the rest, was fairly surprised, but no more so than the average taxpayer when he sees the rôle assigned to him by that

old flatterer, Henry Morgenthau. I only wish I were half the man you think I am, Harry, is my usual reaction, and very likely yours, too.

It is an interesting though schizophrenic sensation. Here is a stranger who bears your own name, who has the same number of dependents, and the two of you seem to be kinsmen, in a psychotic kind of way. This dazzling fellow lives at the same address, too, though why a lad with his kind of money would want to share quarters like that is hard to understand. If he lives on the same scale as he pays taxes, he must live very well indeed. Strictly the *à la carte* type, never without a pair of theater tickets in his pocket, never sneaking a look at the prices when he sits down to order dinner, etc. How ashamed, I often think, he would be of the life led by the ugly duckling of this dual personality, in my case, me.

It is a stimulating and hair-raising experience, to meet this Stranger Who Owes Your Taxes. It would be even more stimulating if this free-spending, intensely patriotic and unselfish impostor had some plan in mind for raising the dough. If he hasn't, one of the two partners in this split personality is going to be in serious trouble, and there never is much doubt which one.

These handy tax tables are not only the finest thing of their kind since the Murders in the Rue Morgue, they are also purifying. In the past, many of us have chased the Almighty Dollar, and though we were lucky to end up with a nickel or a dime, it was not from lack of greed. Meanwhile, a few finer spirits scorned such materialism and worked for the sheer love of working. Their motives made our own look tawdry and hoggish. Well, shove over, altruists. Another involuntary idealist just came in.

Out of Gas

THIS IS GOING to sound a little testy, but I wish the thousands of motorists who are curtailing their driving would quit curtailing it up and down the street I live on.

They closed one of the main-travelled thoroughfares only a few blocks away, while I was sitting around wondering whether it would be all right to use the eraser on the end of my pencil, and this brought the traffic over to my street. I say 'my' street only in the roughest sense of the word 'my,' for the fact is, I only rent, and just looked out the window to see three drivers jockeying for the right to park across my driveway. At any rate, whosever street it is, this quiet little lane has been running with automobiles like a gutter after a cloudburst.

All day Sunday, the cars went by as if my little nest were a reviewing stand. It was a pageant of transportation, it was motorized America on parade. At times, the cars were lined up for a solid block, held motionless by the fact that east-west traffic, up at the corner, was just as thick as the north-south flow. Here were rival columns of patriots, blocking each other at the intersection.

Apparently they were just out for a little Sunday cur-

tailment in the country, as they did not seem to be going any place; just curtailng around, wearing out the tires. The parade started early and lasted late. Cars were still curtailng by at one and two o'clock in the morning. Curtailng fairly remarkably fast, too, considering the 35 mile an hour limit. So fast, in some cases, you would have supposed gold had been discovered in Wisconsin, or possibly butter. There is apparently nothing that will keep these motorists off of wheels, but I wish they wouldn't go so fast. Look, fellows, children play on this street, and Heaven knows that's enough.

It is an odd experience, considering all you read about the rubber situation, to look out into a stream of traffic like that. It is even odder to see your driveway blocked. I want to advise those fellows to be careful. There is a mail truck driver who regards that space as his alone. He is pretty stingy about it, too, and brooks no trespassing from other trespassers, or from the right-ful tenant, either.

I got to thinking, sitting there with the rich smell of burning tires wreathing about my head, how different it would be under a totalitarian government. What relief would I have then, against that mail truck? What chance would I have of getting the driver to park on the other side of the street, where there is a space for that purpose? To call up his superior would probably get nothing but a short, surly answer about the rights of governmental employees being far paramount to any rights of mine. 'Nothing can be done,' the gruppen-fuehrer would tell me.

Whereas under our system, if I were to call up the postmaster, the whole thing could be cleared up in a flash — what's wrong with that sentence?

The OPA checks up on motorists every now and then, to see if they are misusing their gasoline ration, but it never seems to do much good. For one thing, every motorist halted is the very picture of outraged innocence.

What is he doing, 600 miles from home, on an A card? Why, he has driven there to visit his aged mother, who is 97 years old today, and still hanging around summer resorts.

Where did he get the gasoline? Why, he saved it, drop by drop, in an old blue cup right next to his piggy bank. This is the first time since the inauguration of gas rationing that he has as much as had his car out of the garage, and to be halted now is more than mortal man should be asked to put up with.

Pleasure trip? Why, he hates every weary mile of it, and the fact that he has a string of fish in the back is the purest coincidence.

Everyone who gets tagged, in a checkup like that, is a defense worker, too.

He has been working 16 hours a day, seven days a week, and this is the first time anyone has been able to tear him from his duty. One more week and he would have collapsed right at his lathe, dealing production a blow that would set it reeling. Friends pleaded with him to get out and get a little rest. 'You owe it to your country,' they said. 'Why don't you knock off on the Fourth of July and get yourself a civilian furlough?' So he just got in the car and started out and here he is in the scenic state of Wisconsin, or Minnesota, forcing himself to relax. For anyone to question his use of gasoline is like stopping Donald Nelson. It is not only a bum rap — it is downright ingratitude.

Did I say, a minute ago, that our poor harassed motorist is visiting his aged mother? It is an aunt, and she is ill. In fact, she is at death's door, and the dear old lady is failing fast. Her last wish in life is to see her only nephew, and he has answered the call without thought of expense or inconvenience. It is mighty nice of him to come, too, for it has meant dropping everything, especially work. He had to lay off Friday to get ready, and it will mean giving up work on Saturday, too. But here he is, like the fine dutiful nephew he is. To halt and question a man of his stripe, on what is not only an errand of mercy but a very sad mission, is like tripping a doctor.

Shall his old aunt be condemned to loneliness just because she lives in the middle of a resort country? Is it her fault if her native town is noted for good fishing? Would anyone criticize a feeble old lady for falling ill in the middle of the vacation season?

It's a tossup who is more misunderstood, those en route to visit ailing relatives or those whose cars were stolen. The latter parked their cars to go to work, and some thief or saboteur came and drove it to a well known vacation spot. In a way, those are the saddest stories of the whole heart-breaking lot.

As must be true with other A-card holders, the volume of traffic puzzled me for a while, and I used to ask about it. 'How can you make a trip like that?' would be the innocent query, 'when all you've got is an A card?' That leads to nothing but another blow to the ego, such as received upon learning that the War Manpower Commission regards your life work in a class with tattooing, umbrella mending, and vagrancy. You discover there aren't many of us A-card nobodies around.

Good old Thurlow, it turns out, is an unsuspected farmer. Yes, got a little place out by Corn Borer, Oklahoma, six states away. And naturally, good old Thurlow has to drive out there and see what the tenant is up to, or the tenant would be helpless and food production would take a sickening sag that might mean a complete revision of the war plans. Incidentally, Thurlow's tenant has a tractor and a truck, and a tank full of fine gasoline, so taking one thing with another, gas rationing to Thurlow is just a song.

In Henry's case, now, it develops that Henry is in an essential industry. 'Aren't you tending bar any more?' you ask him. 'Yes,' says Henry, 'but out where I live, they regard that as an essential occupation. For a while I had unlimited gasoline, but they have tightened up, and all I am allowed now is five thousand miles a month.'

With Pete, it's different. Pete drives about fifty miles a day to get to his office, and you wouldn't suppose he could do it, but it is explained that he is in the war effort. 'I thought he manufactured finger-nail files,' you remark. 'He does,' it is explained, 'but he sells them to war-workers.'

I hope Secretary Ickes won't think this is a squawk, as it isn't. He can cut the value of my A card as low as he likes. I hope he never expects to save much gasoline, however, by trimming the A-card holders. There aren't enough of us to make much difference. There *is* one way he could save a little gas, and I wish he would give it his earnest consideration. That is by taking every ounce of gasoline away from the taxi drivers, and making them operate on low-grade kerosene or if possible, low-grade whale oil. They are getting meaner, surlier

and greedier every day, Mr. Secretary, and there is no reason why they should get rich out of gas rationing without sharing the difficulties. If there is a shortage of kerosene as well as gasoline, then I would take all fuel away from them and make the bums use pedals.

Not being supposed to have any gasoline has made it a little tough for taking week-end outings, or Civilian Furloughs, but thousands do it, under conditions that should reassure anyone who fears the pioneer spirit is dead. Drivers on pleasure trips of this strange sort skulk along as if running booze, trying to look as if the car burned charcoal, and on their faces is an expression as stern as that of Gen. Washington in the prow of that rowboat. Gas is only one of their problems; they are also wondering how to take this outing without seeming to have fun. It will develop that this latter fear is groundless; they are going to have a terrible time.

I brightened when it was announced the Office of Defense Transportation intended to launch a mighty anti-travel campaign, backed by a lot of advertising, as it looked for a minute as if this would produce some lovely two-faced resort advertisements, reading perhaps, like this: 'Don't Come To Inviting Camp Sylvan, Only \$10 a Day,' or 'Uncle Sam Says Stay Away From Our Beautiful Cabins, Rates on Request.' As it turned out, most of the persuasion has been aimed at urging civilians not to ride the railroads unless on the most urgent business. As everyone knows this has produced the greatest railroad travel in years.

It was an interesting idea, though, that of discouraging travel, and it could have been done as easy as pie. In the past, the various wonderlands have outdone each other in bidding for the vacationist's favor, using hon-

eyed words that would do if inviting the President to come and set up the summer White House. All it would take to drive the vacationists away would be to drop this fawning hospitality and substitute a note of honest hostility, letting the vacationists know what the natives really think of them. 'You're Just a Pain to Picturesque Maine,' 'Why Be a Pest to the Sun-Kissed West?' and 'Tucson's Fine, What's it to You?' would help express the new sincerity. It wouldn't be hard to keep the customers away. All you would have to do is to create, before the traveller sets out, the mood in which he usually comes home.

But it is the shorter jaunts that prove the spirit of the covered wagon is not dead in the land. Here is a guilty little party sneaking out to spend a week-end in a spot they never saw before in their lives, old Lake Algae, said to be very nice. It is an expedition that calls for courage and endurance. There is no chance Indians will get them, of course, but there is a chance the OPA will, on charges of pleasure driving. Outside of the gasoline consumption, to call this pleasure would be a very bum rap indeed.

They have reservations, they think, but outside of reservations they have nothing but hope, courage and exactly enough gas to get there and back if everything goes off perfectly. Furthermore, there is every chance that the man who made the reservations has quit, in the meantime, for a better job.

They will swim in stagnant water they never saw before, faring out on a lake of unknown depth, never knowing where the shallows are and too proud to ask.

The water they swim in, while a little cloudy, is as White Rock to the water they drink. This has a strange

and forbidding taste, so that they wonder uneasily what they are going to catch from it.

But does this deter them from drinking it? Not at all. After all, the water can't be any worse than the ice. The ice comes in odd-shaped chunks, and is plainly not the product of any refrigerator. It is natural ice. It tastes as if it had been made in an old granite quarry, although not this year, nor last, but long, long, ago. It tastes, in fact, as if it had been left over from the Ice Age. But our dauntless pleasure-seekers down the water, cooling it with the pearl-gray ice, and perhaps it makes no difference, for they are stirring it with an old spoon no one dares to think much about, either. And by this time they are mixing it with whisky for which they have searched longer and harder than Stanley searched for Livingstone.

They found it in a place about equally attractive, too, a joint so reptilian and frowsy that it seems like a little bit of Tobacco Road, transplanted to the lake country. There is nothing in the world to guarantee that the stuff is not pure poison, although to get it, they had to pay the price of Grade A Champagne, yea, ethyl champagne, if such there be.

But they down this stuff with a strength of will that would do credit to Socrates himself.

These heroes of mine scorn anything that is not a mixture of slum, fire-hazard, and makeshift plumbing. The pioneers were brave enough in their way, no doubt, but they chose uninhabited country.

How's Your Morale?

THE WORST thing about the small hardships civilians are asked to endure in this war is nicely illustrated, I think, by a little bird song I read just about the time it appeared there would be no tires and shortly thereafter, no car. If you considered that prospect as a contribution you would have to make to the war, a nuisance, but a constructive one, you will share my resentment at being told that when forced to walk, I would have the time of my life. War, it appeared, could be more darned fun than anything.

'Soon we will run out of tires and cannot see our automobiles,' said the writer in question. 'A look of stoicism comes on the faces of most people. But as for me, all I say is, "Goody, hurrah."'

So as to have no question about gender, it was a lady writer who was saying goody, hurrah, but there are men of the same gladsome cast of mind. This lass is simply a little gladder than the others.

'I will have to walk twelve to twenty miles a day,' she exults, 'and what will that mean? I will have a lovely rose-suffused complexion, a clear slippery eye, a steady broad-smiling nervous system, an easy stride, and an

earth-spurning tread. And my soul will become so much nicer.'

Anyone who fears that war is futile should be reassured by that. This war is good for the complexion, not to mention this chick's nervous system and her slippery eye.

Another silver lining this journalistic robin found in the tire situation was that it would usher in a new era of endurance visiting. Instead of just dropping in for six or eight hours of an evening, she predicted, friends would move in and stay for three or four days at a time.

'I have stored a month's provisions,' she wrote, 'and we will have leisure, talk. We will talk about our souls. We will read aloud long books like "War and Peace." We will have a chess tournament. You see how wonderful it will be? Again, we will really know our friends.'

Along with really knowing our friends (which would be the last we'd see of *them*) we would all feel peachy, my sunny friend continued, due simply to walking, to picking them up and laying them down, picking them up and laying them down. She offered to bet anyone in this big round world — I got the impression she thinks the equator is a ribbon — that walking would improve his disposition until he barely recognized himself.

You would feel 'jocund and free, full of hope, full of exuberance and good ideas,' she promised, if only you would walk ten miles a day for two weeks. It is an experience no one can try, she insisted, without coming out a finer, better person. And if you don't believe this lark, you have got to walk one hundred and forty miles to disprove her. I don't think I am over-enthusiastic when I say 'Bah.'

The story is no gladder than many others, and the trouble with them is, they all sound hollower than a gourd. The first signs of gas rationing produced another set of stories on the joys of walking, and when it became clear that taxes were going to be something murderous, these silver-lining addicts promptly wrote a lot of enthusiastic talk about the delights of poverty. In view of the fact that walking is only slightly less popular in this country than fasting, rock-crushing or tire-changing, you'd think that popularizing it was a hopeless cause. The same with poverty, which like walking, may be honorable and even patriotic, but is pretty generally conceded, by those in the know, to be a damn nuisance.

Sure, everyone would be hard up, said these voluntary virtue-finders, or whatever you call that cast of mind, but that would be a romp. It would take us back to the simple life of our forebears. We would learn to like simple, economical foods, we would sip hard cider instead of Scotch, we would play parlor games and might even wear patches. They seemed to look on it as a gay prank, a kind of universal Hard Times party. That is a pleasant attitude to take, but if these blithe spirits will consult a few insiders, who have had first-hand experience with financial stringency, they can get that happy smile pushed right down their golden throats. It is fine to keep a stiff upper lip, it is nice to look on the brighter side of things. But until the happiness kids find a brighter side that is actually brighter, I wish they would leave us to our own gloomy devices.

Gas rationing, these stories usually said, would be a barrel of fun because it would lead to a re-discovery of the home. Far from being dull and prosaic, home would turn out to have undreamed of recreation facilities, and

the citizen who was marooned there would have the time of his life. Once he had tasted the delights of spending happy evenings around the hearth, wondering where to get wood or coal, he would learn that home is the brightest spot in town.

This is bound to ring a little false when you consider the bad entertainment that has been getting a play for years, just because of the urge to get out of the house a while. As a matter of fact, if divorce were listed on the New York Stock Exchange it would rise 20 points every time they shorten the gas ration.

Oh yes, and there was going to be a new neighborliness. Unable to drive half across town to spend an evening, the gasless, tireless civilian would find new friends right among his own neighbors. That undoubtedly has happened, too, but I doubt if anyone has been very happy about it. What you have, in a case like this, is a little group of men and women gathered together because no one has enough gasoline to go anywhere else, which must produce some of the soggiest evenings it is possible to imagine.

It isn't the civilian sacrifices that are ruining my morale; it's all this sunny gladness about them. Leave our little sacrifices alone, will you, Cuddles? We like them the way they are.

If people of that jolly ilk must be glad about something, why don't they be glad for the vegetables? There is the success story of the war — the rise of the most ordinary garden truck to prices so high it is almost impossible to recognize these items as the dietary bums they used to be.

They say, for example, that leaf lettuce is selling at this writing for around 45 cents. This is said to mean

'45 cents a pound,' not 45 cents a bale, or ton. Just what the price was this time a year ago, this reporter doesn't know, but it seems certain that 45 cents would have purchased a wagon-load. As a matter of fact, a man with 45 cents could get four hamburgers and a cup of coffee, in those quaint days, and wouldn't have had to eat lettuce at all.

It is hard to believe this can be the same old lettuce we knew of yore, when they used to tan it and stick it in sandwiches. You would suppose they had developed a new type, possibly with a little more flavor; but no. It is plain old leaf lettuce, as ever was. The only difference is that it now commands the price of meat.

The same magic wand has touched our little friend the tomato, too. They were saying the other day that a single tomato, weighed by the grocer as carefully as if he were selling gold dust, assayed at 23 cents. This was not the grand champion of the county fair, mind you. This was not a new Mrs. Miniver tomato some Burbank had crossed with Thousand Island dressing. This was just a tomato, nothing more, nothing less. If you have tomato plants in your Victory Garden, and they show any signs of propagating, you will do well to take them in at night, for at these prices we are in for a bad wave of tomato rustling. As for what the signs of propagating are, you will have to find that out for yourself, dear, as Daddy doesn't know.

They say wax beans bring as much as 35 cents a quart, and that crazed broccoli fiends are paying up to 39 and 40 cents a bunch. Oddly enough, this does not mean cooked broccoli, either, but raw. Forty cents a bunch is about what I would pay for broccoli that was cooked by a first-class chef and then eaten for me. As for asparagus,

they say these exotic blooms were up as high as 69 cents a bunch, which is only slightly less than long-stemmed American beauty roses, but have slipped from this dizzy pinnacle and can now be purchased at some cut-rate asparagus dens for 3 or 4 cents a stalk. How is it served these days — in old Sèvres vases?

The same sea-change has revolutionized the one-time commonplace potato. There is a noble tuber, the potato: good for making cakes, potato soup and many another nutritious dish. The potato has averted famines, is a source of Irish whiskey and either contains all the known vitamins or I don't want to know different. Even so, it is somewhat astonishing to find that potatoes which were around a quarter for a big, lumpy sack are now from 10 to 15 cents a pound.

At prices like that, it would be cheaper to give up vegetables and make a meal of camellias, gardenias and imported gladiolus bulbs. How do these costly potatoes come — individually wrapped in cellophane? How are they displayed — a single potato, gleaming dully on a cushion of black velvet?

I was going to figure out the probable cost, at these prices, of a New England boiled dinner, but it would only lead to melancholy.

I wish, incidentally, that the incurable optimists who make up the figures on the cost of living would add tuna fish to their list. These figures appear every month or so, and would be highly reassuring if only things didn't cost so damn much, as they invariably carry the cheery message that the cost of living has risen a mere two or five or seven per cent, which is as moderate as it is preposterous. Just what items are included I don't know; ostrich plumes, high button shoes and sledge dogs are

some of the staples on the list, it seems certain. At any rate, I wish they would add tuna fish, for I believe I now possess thirteen ounces of the grand champion.

I found this canned hero in a delicatessen store, and the way I know he is the champ is only too easy — the price. He was selling at the flossy figure of 98 cents the small can. It is marked 'extra fancy,' and must be fancy indeed; this must be the fanciest tuna ever hauled dripping from the Pacific. Before the war ninety-eight cents would have bought at least twice that much tuna fish plus a ride on the boat that caught it.

Here is a dish that was not merely ordinary, before the war, but a little on the plebeian side. Good, plain, wholesome food, as the phrase goes, meaning 'not much.' But here it was, selling for the price of lobster.

A careful inspection, without opening, indicates that this is a No. 1 can, and I thought for one wild moment they had started numbering them, like etchings or limited editions. That is wrong, of course; the figure simply indicates the size or capacity.

As for the can itself, the material seems to be an ordinary good grade of tin-can tin. You might suppose, at these prices, that the stuff was put up in white gold, or at the very least, stainless steel, but if so the can doesn't mention it. Neither is there anything special about the label. The label is nice — a fish picture — but does not look to be hand-painted, and if it is the work of some famous fish artist, he neglected to sign his name. Neither does there seem to be anything revolutionary about the canning process.

The label says this fish is packed in cottonseed oil, but another can of tuna fish, bought before we started to ward off inflation, says the same thing. The only

other clue on the label comes in the words 'salt added.' You could add a lot of salt for 98 cents, so that hardly explains the superlative price, unless it means 'salt added, grain by grain.'

Nothing accounts for it, in fact — it must be the contents.

I could clear up this mystery in a minute by opening the can, but who can afford to eat tuna fish at 98 cents the 13 oz.? I intend to eat this can by candlelight, opening it like the last bottle of Amontillado.

My dictionary says the tuna fish is 'any one of several mackerel-like, coarse fleshed, oily fishes, found in all warm seas and sometimes weighing one thousand pounds.' At one dollar and twenty cents a pound, which is what the champ cost me, a thousand-pound tuna would be Big Business.

Seed 'Em and Weep

ONE OF THE most remarkable aspects of Victory Gardening, outside of finding yourself doing it, is the dynamic quality of the seeds you can buy, and just by chance, too.

You might not care for my lettuce, but I cannot blame the seed. All I asked for was a package of lettuce seed, but the description on the package made it immediately clear I had stumbled into lettuce fit for a king. This, it said, is 'a large, tender, crisp loose head, of bright green leaves tinged with brownish red.' Now mind you, I didn't ask for the most picturesque lettuce, or even for good lettuce. All I said was 'lettuce.' Yet what I got was a type which, if it had come up to specifications, a man would be happy to have in his living room. Rembrandt would have been glad to paint it, let alone eat it.

'They remain sweet long,' the package continued, 'and are slow to go to seed.' I wouldn't ask more than that for an epitaph.

It seems the same blind luck had me by the hot little hand when I walked into another store and mumbled a request for radish seeds. Had the man asked 'What

kind of radish seeds?' I would have had to turn and run out, for while knowing that there are red radishes and white radishes, I hadn't made a decision even on the color. Here again, I took what was handed me, and what was handed over turned out to be not merely all right, not merely a pretty fair brand of radish, not merely so-so, but the very peer of the radish clan.

'Peer,' in fact, is the word they used. 'The peer of all round white-tips,' the package said. 'Crisp and sweet, and remaining fit for use longer than other globe-shaped radishes. Very attractive, and highly recommended for —' A couple of words got torn off at that corner, before I grew interested in the reading material on seed packages, but it makes no difference. Obviously, the attractive peer of all round white-tips can be highly recommended for anything whatsoever, including serving to visiting royalty.

Thus simply by chance, this Victory Gardener had found seed that would grow superlative radishes and lettuce as fair as a daffodil. They were no whit more impressive than the beans. Some day, with machete and micrometer, I intend to fight my way through my little thicket and put those beans to the test. I say 'micrometer' because the package spoke of these beans as having been designed with remarkable precision. These seeds, it said, grow pods five and one half inches long and five-sixteenths of an inch thick. When I contrasted that scientific accuracy with the sloppy way I bought and planted them, I felt like an unappreciative ignoramus.

Furthermore, if these Brahmins lived up to their promise, to their breeding, to their background, then they were going to be exceedingly tasty, especially for beans. The package said they were 'fleshy, stringless,

fine-grained and tender.' You couldn't ask more than that of an artichoke, let alone a mess of beans. In fact, you couldn't ask more than that of a love affair.

Another thing that makes the ham gardener feel a little embarrassed is the well-nigh incredible pains the company takes in selecting beans like this. The firm 'conducts over 52,000 germination tests annually,' the package said, 'to insure your getting seeds that will *grow*. Over 9,000 purity trials, and countless single plant selections, are made every year to insure your getting seed of uniformly superb quality. Some of this painstaking work produced the seed in this carton. It was bred to produce brittle, luscious snap beans — and plenty of them.'

I can only wish the garden itself got the same painstaking work, instead of the abuse and neglect that is its lot. Maybe it's true I wouldn't know a germination test if I saw one, but I take off my hat to seed that passes over 9,000 purity trials. Could you?

Even with a start like that, a vegetable's life is remarkably precarious. I chanced on a garden book that will have your flesh crawling with its recital of what a chamber of horrors a smiling little vegetable patch can be.

The onion, now, certainly seems sturdy enough, and if there is one garden item that would seem to merit the term 'vegetating,' you might suppose this is it. Well, it turns out that the onion is chased by things that make the Hound of the Baskervilles seem playful. The onion's life is a hell on earth. The first gruesome fate mentioned by this garden book is Smut, described as 'a serious onion disease living in the soil where smutted onions have been grown.' The word 'serious' is no loose talk, judging from the description that follows.

Smut is said to 'cause little blisters of black powdery spores on the young plant's leaves, killing them and reducing the yield.' I don't think it is going a bit too far to say that killing the onions would truly reduce their yield. And even if it doesn't kill, an attack like this ought to give an onion a damn good scare.

Another little horror lurking just around the corner is Onion Mildew, for which you are abjured to spray with a powerful anti-mildew mixture not once but 'as often as necessary.' For Onion Mildew spreads rapidly, and causes a wilting.

What has had me eating sulpha tablets like salted peanuts, however, is neither of these, but a pest called the Onion Thrip. 'Onion thrips,' the book says, 'are very small, whitish or yellowish-brown colored insects. They are very disastrous when numerous, attacking and feeding on the lower part of the leaves, causing an appearance giving rise to the common names of "silver top," "white blast," or "white blight."' This seems to be kind of a joshing name for having the underside of your leaves eaten away.

Well, unless this garden book is from the pages of *Weird Story Magazine*, that ought just about to do, you might think, for the onion. There is still, however, the Onion Maggot. The book says the onion maggot 'lays little white eggs on the onion plant,' which sounded real cozy, like Jenny Wren. But when the eggs hatch, out come larvae which 'eat into the bulbs and often destroy the whole onion.' Even when a thing like that doesn't destroy, certainly it would give the victim a nasty surprise.

That is a pretty unsettling picture, and it is reassuring to learn that there are sections of the garden where

life is quieter. Parsley, the book says, 'is not likely to be troubled by diseases and insects,' at least not troubled in the sense of being mildewed, turned white, wilting and having its leaves eaten away. In the case of peas, however, we get right back into the fiendishness department. Peas, it turns out, are beset not only by the pea weevil but also by the pea aphid, which is described as a 'large pea-green plant louse,' a little pet I ardently trust never acquires an interest in human beings.

Shall I tell you about the potato, eh? Come closer, child. Well, the potato gets a little thing called black-leg, and another called dry rot. Should it escape those, it is still at the mercy of leaf mosaic, fusarium wilt, and curly leaf. And waiting right around the corner is the Blister Beetle, behind which painful-sounding monster is a combination offer called the Flea Beetle. Thus it would be possible for a potato in the grip of fusarium wilt to be attacked at the same time by flea beetles.

It has been no small revelation to find out what goes on in my garden. It has been an even smaller pleasure.

That is the trouble with the garden books — not that they aren't good; they are far too good. For 25 cents you can buy a volume that would do if you intended to farm the whole Salinas Valley. A good many of us need that quality of advice about as much as we need a five-ton truck to haul away the produce. For instance, I have a booklet written by, and containing the lifetime research of, the extension professor of vegetable gardening of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, a Professor Nissley. I frequently feel that if Professor Nissley knew who was reading his book he would wilt as though attacked by the dread leaf-hopper.

To be frank about it, Professor Nissley's book does

not answer the kind of questions that arise in a garden like mine. I have read his section on lettuce in detail, and it tells more about lettuce than you would suppose there was to be told, but it sheds little or no light on what it is I am growing in my own lettuce bed. One of the types I am producing, if not inventing, is a handsome bushy growth that has neither the color of lettuce nor the characteristic crimping around the edges. The leaves of this botanical sport are shaped more like those of a maple tree, and are several shades darker than any lettuce described in Professor Nissley's work, except that the stuff is pale and sickly on the under leaves as if trying to look like blanched celery.

Another place in which Professor Nissley's invaluable reference work does not fit my amateur problems is his section on carrots. He describes five or six good varieties, including the Chantenay, and the Emperor. He tells of the Nantes, too, which is short and fat, and the Hutchinson, which appears from the illustration to be only slightly smaller, over-all, than a good ear of corn. It would be a pleasure to raise any of these.

What I have developed, however, is apparently a ne'er-do-well or Reverse Hutchinson that runs to fancy tops and little or no carrot. It is a flashy little bush, as thick and luxurious as a Civil War beard, and would look beautiful for potting and putting in hotel lobbies. That handsome fernery, however, is as false a front as ever concealed a worthless nature. When you seize this foliage and uproot it, up comes a carrot about as thick as a piece of string. Where Professor Nissley and I part company is all too clear. He describes his carrots as containing vitamins A, B-1, B-2 and C. Mine could be described as looking as if they needed them. His car-

rots contain water, protein, fat, ash, calcium, fiber, sugar and starch, the book says. Mine don't even contain carrot.

It is not Professor Nissley's fault that his book falls so far short of meeting the needs of gardens like mine; he happens to know the respectable kind of vegetables, that's all, and I get the Dead End Kids. I admire his learning, and wish him success, back at the New Jersey Experiment Station. Some day when he tires of orthodox gardening, and wants to see a joint where everything is experimental, I hope he'll look me up.

My Day

WHAT A DAY I had yesterday, and you had, too, but it's my typewriter, so we'll discuss mine. If I can believe what I read in the ads and hear on my gabby little radio, I was astonished six or seven times before breakfast and experienced such a success of wonders as would leave a really sensitive soul in a state of total emotional collapse long before noon.

Let's see: first-off, I was awakened by the low throaty rasp of an alarm clock that was a Terrific Bargain at the time of its purchase and was described as giving off a musical hum that wakes the sleeper as gently as a mother's kiss.

Next I lighted a cigarette that is so mellow, so kind to the throat, and such an exquisite blend of the choicest and the rarest tobaccos, that it is a God's wonder I didn't lie there all day, like an opium eater, in sheer delight.

Then came a cup of wonder-coffee, full-flavored and aromatic, picked, just for me, from exactly the right side of the right mountains in the country where coffee grows best. I think it was that kind; maybe it was the other brand that is blended like music, with a dash of

one kind of coffee bean to match the rich ripe fullness of the bass passages, a dash of another to match the smoothness of the strings, a third for something else, the mellow goodness of a B-flat clarinet, I believe, and then a fourth to provide the dash and piquancy of the brass section. I claim that is going to as much expense and trouble as it is possible to go in composing coffee and would ask the co. for a special blend based on more trombones and less horns in F except for the fact that I can't taste the first two or three cups much, anyway.

Well, after choking down a couple of slugs of coffee fit for Brahms himself, I went in to wash my teeth, and here there was a hard choice to make. There was one dentifrice which not only shines teeth brighter, whiter, but lasts longer, because of a new ingredient described simply as Amazing. There was a rival which by a revolutionary new discovery you don't have to squeeze out of a tube but can pour out of a bottle. Heigh ho, what a banquet for the snappers!

And all this, mind you, in the first five or ten minutes of the day.

It's too bad I didn't have one of the Nubians keep a list of the astonishing details, for some of the amazements escape me. For instance, I can't remember just which exciting, alluring new soap I washed the features with, but believe it was a kind that in ten days will make a blacksmith's mitts as soft as velvet. Not figuring on doing much alluring, at least not before sundown, I forgot to make a note of the brand.

Washing the last of its creamy goodness out of my eyes, I could see that even scrubbing with a love-potion like this was not going to make my whiskers lovely and alluring, and it would be necessary to shave. This was

really the low point of the morning, for I made use of some old-fashioned shaving soap that is not even startling, let alone revolutionary, amazing, or aphrodisiac, and the razor was pretty commonplace, too. About all its makers ever say for it is that it will take whiskers off.

The lotion with which I cauterized the wounds hardly merits mention, either; as I recall, it is simply *The Choice of Celebrities*, and merely superlative. The breakfast food which I shunned, however, was not only *Temptingly Delicious* but works a little revolution in personality; it sends you down to the office with a spring in your step, the advertising says, which is a nice change from the ordinary procedure of creeping in like a whipped dog. I gave it a pass, and chose the newspapers, instead. There were one or two *Incredible* stories, one or two *Amazing* ones, and the ads told of several sensational offers in the way of merchandise that was being thrown on sale with reckless disregard of the consequences. Turning to the book column, I read that two or three epochal and unforgettable books were ready, but for anyone jaded with epochal reading matter, the movie ads spoke of a nice choice of smash hits, including both *Laugh Riots* and stories of *Stark Horror*. Personally, all I care for, any more, is a story of *Flaming Lust* and *Paralysing Terror* set in a leaking submarine, but it is conceivable that a *Smash Laugh Riot* or *Mirthquake* would be all right as a starter, or emotional prelim. If it turned out to lack interest, you could always set the theater on fire.

That's the average day, as advertised: a mixture of the amazing, the astonishing, the incredible, the soul-withering, and the fabulous. Seems a little odd it can be so tedious.

Certainly it isn't radio's fault. Mine not only intones preposterous assertions about everything from beer to self-taught piano lessons but does a great deal to lift listeners to this same fanciful level. To create a train that not only talks as it chugs but talks about a headache remedy — that, as has been remarked elsewhere, not only erases the old-time distinction between animate and inanimate objects but compounds whimsy and pushes the borderline of fantasy back at least forty miles. And it may be that I'm new around here, but I still find something improbable about hearing a salestalk for a stomach remedy set to three-part harmony.

I missed an event that must be a milestone in radio entertainment, but just because I missed it is no reason why you should get the same easy out. My radio told me about it a week late. One of those fun programs was going on, with the studio audience taking part in all manner of pranks under the guidance of perhaps the most vivacious announcer in the business. Suddenly this funster began talking about a truly remarkable little antic he had staged the week before; and if he didn't have every rival radio producer biting his lip to a bloody pulp, then there isn't the competition in radio you might assume, for this stunt stepped so far ahead as to render all customary radio entertainment downright stilted.

'Last week,' the announcer gurgled, 'we asked our twenty million listeners to go to their door, and when someone came by — friend or perfect stranger — to go like this, bubble-ubble-ubble.' For any of you sticks who have not gone bubble-ubble-ubble lately, it should be explained that this is the noise made by riffing the lips with the fingers. The announcer went on to relate

that literally thousands of these suggestible twenty millions had done as they were bade, and had had a bushel of fun watching the look of surprise, not to say dismay, on the bypassers' faces.

Now, plenty of radio shows go in for audience participation, meaning that they let the studio audience take part in the program, like the amnesia victims who appear at the various quiz shows and can't think of the answers to such teasers as 'What has four legs and runs in horse races?' or 'What is unusual about cannibals?' It would be interesting to know, incidentally, how some of these people find their way home from the studio. The point, however, is that here is audience participation raised to a new magnitude. It is one thing to ask a few hundred spectators to clown a little, gathered in one studio in one city. It is something far more imaginative to ask twenty million free citizens, in their homes, to step outside and make idiot-noises at perfect strangers. That is pioneering, that is breaking new ground.

It stole a long lead on other audience-participation shows, and I doubt if rival producers can ever catch up. You could ask your listeners to go to the window and whistle at strangers, you could ask them to wiggle their ears, or crack their knuckles. You could ask them to go out and soap windows, you could ask them to thumb their noses at each other, you could ask them to spin around until they get dizzy. They might do it, too, but those are steals, and will never match the night when a nationwide audience was asked to go into the open and thrum on its twenty million kissers.

Undoubtedly you have thought a great deal about the miracle of radio, as it is often called, and the magic by which it erases space, tames the lightning, and makes it

carry messages about soap. You have also wondered about the possible effect of bringing entire nations, as it were, around one table. Well, don't give it another thought. Just step to the door and say bubble-ubble-ubble. As for me, I have no time for problems of that sort as I have still to dope out what a Lovely Bride would know about soap that her old lady wouldn't know better. Listening to the daytime radio serials one afternoon, while sitting at home with a broken leg (while friends who had come to top my accident story with their own were outside playing on my crutches) I heard a lot of talk about soap That Lovely Brides Recommend. If that is true, to whom? To would-be brides, is about the only possible assumption. Any time it is decided to junk the regular programs and put some of those recommendations on the air instead, it should make something pretty sprightly.

That was a fairly representative day in the serials. The heroine in one of the stories was in tears as the action began, and it developed a visitor was coming to dinner and the poor battered soul felt sure she would drop the stew. Right when things looked darkest, friends with whom she had been discussing this crisis said they'd pitch in and help. Why they didn't think of it fifteen minutes sooner, many will say, provides a nice element of suspense. Then there was lovable old David Harum in a tale of duplicity and low cost housing. Seems someone had bought a parcel of land from Old Zeke Swinney, a scamp, and David was in something of a pickle, as it looked as if Zeke had crossed him up and was putting over a perfectly honest deal. Sometime later in the afternoon I found myself listening spellbound to a little scolding for frittering my time away. This

came from a character named Edith, who was spurning a chance to go on the stage. 'This is no time for play-acting,' she said sternly. To hear a blast against escapism coming from a daytime radio serial got me so mixed up I never did hear how she finally came out.

As a matter of fact, the most interesting character of the afternoon appeared in one of the commercials. She was a Mrs. Klobber, or something of that sort, who, it was explained, used to be 'a dishpan dreamer.' What she dreamed about, they didn't say, nor just how she induced this state, although apparently that was done by immersing the hands in a pan of suds. The psychology books will go far before they top the case of a babe who falls into a dream state when she gets her hands wet, and I would like to know more about this dishwater De Quincey, but all they said was that she had now adopted the kind of soap advertised on the program in question. You would expect the next statement to be that along with having dreams she was now having hallucinations in technicolor or at the very least, seeing mirages, but no. All they said was that in no time at all Mrs. Klobber's hands had turned so lovely that she was tickled pink. 'I'm the happiest woman in Louisville,' she gloated. With a pair of mitts that lovely it was pretty obvious Mrs. Klobber would never risk them in dishwater again.

One thing many must find a little irksome about the folksier of the daytime sagas is the frequent assumption that you are tuning in from a tenement. 'This is the story,' the announcer will murmur, 'of life in Cowbell Corners, among simple, plain, ruttish, down to earth people just like you. We will meet Henry, an ignorant but lovable sharecropper; his wife, Lilly, who only got

as far as the fourth grade; their two mongrel dogs; and Uncle Thurlow, who has just come over from his quarters in the county poor farm. Just plain, wholesome, shabby underprivileged nobodies like yourselves, having their troubles, having their joys, but never getting anywhere, just like you. As we enter today we find Henry eating a hasty breakfast, preparatory to going over to the railroad, where he steals coal. Lilly is chipping out an arrowhead.'

Well, gents, you and your product can go climb a rope. We 'uns had a floor in our shanty and furthermore it was quartersawed oak.

We'll even have new gunny sacks for the windows, might be, if I can finish a little songwriting job I am doing for Lanny Ross, the singer. Why is it, he asked a little wistfully on the radio one night, that nobody ever writes a song about North Dakota? Frankly, it never occurred to me that there would be much demand for a number like that, but if Mr. Ross can wait a little longer, hope to have something ready for him. Tentatively, my North Dakota ballad expresses the thought that 'Life ain't no lark, in old Bismarck.' There will be a final passage in which a native son of that underpopulated though sunburned state says that what he's dreaming, and what he's wishin', is to see somebody try to get him back there, except by extradition.

It may be, Mr. Ross, that one explanation for music's strange lapse in this respect is the difficulty of finding words that rhyme with 'Dakota.' 'I've had more than my quota of North Dakota' is all that suggests itself so far, unless you will settle for use of the abbreviation N.D. That allows a great deal more literary elbow-room as almost anything rhymes with N.D., including 'not a tree,' 'nothing to see,' and 'not for me.'

The kind of song I'm trying to write for you, Lanny, would be kind of a musical narrative, see, with plenty nostalgia. It would start out with a fellow sitting in a luxurious twenty-room duplex, we'll say in New York or Chicago, and dreaming fitfully of his old boyhood home on a farm thirty miles from Pierre. The last time he set eyes on it, he remembers, the summer sun was burning the paint right off the house, and laying the earth open like a busted watermelon, and his fondest recollection is that they sure needed rain. Now he is far, far away from those dear scenes, living in ease and comfort, surrounded by every luxury that money can buy, but what wouldn't he give, is the idea, just for another taste of those home-grown hard times and the chilblains he used to have all winter.

Just to hear the winter wind whistle through the living room once more, just to ride that old plough through clods as hard as brickbats — it is to avoid just that, that our hero has barricaded himself in his living room as our story opens.

Undoubtedly life in North Dakota has its unsuspected charms, and if a fellow could think of them, he might very well turn out a song that would become just as famous as 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny.' Lacking anything more original, I may borrow the melody of another well-known number, 'Home on the Range.' It would be the work of a minute to adapt that one to a North Dakota setting. Making it read, for instance, like this: 'Oh give me a hut by the side of a rut, where the land is as flat as a chair; where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and it's eighty-four miles to Pierre.'

One nice thing about it, Mr. Ross. If you can wait, I feel sure the former North Dakotans can, too.

My Secret

DEAR SIR: Your company writes to ask if I have made any arrangements for buying Christmas cards. I am sorry to be a churl, but I am not going to tell you. You deserve to know the reason behind this unseemly sales resistance, however, and here's why.

There was a time when this shy violet was what is called 'a private citizen.' Well, friend, in recent months and years he has become about as private as a rental library book. The Internal Revenue Department knows every penny I make, which is a sordid chapter I would prefer kept quiet, the draft board has a description of every scar and dimple. My credit rating can be obtained by making a telephone call; there must be a dozen good complete records of every job I ever held; and the brand of my religion is on file more places than I have been to church.

If there were any shreds of privacy left, they vanished the day that first long questionnaire came in from the draft board. Do you remember that one? It called for a description of a man's private life that covered income and outgo in fascinating detail. About the only thing a man could conceal was the amount his daughter squan-

ders on her membership in the Brownies. Whoever read that exhaustive little survey knows things about my affairs I didn't know myself.

My childhood diseases are a matter of record in the offices of various doctors, and schools, the police have my fingerprints, and the state knows the number on my automobile motor, although I don't. I can't think of anyone who has a picture of me in my bath, but aside from that there is almost nothing I have been able to keep to myself. Should all the blanks and questionnaires be assembled at one place, they would make a dossier that would do for Fritz von Papen. More homely, intimate details are available on this lack-luster subject than I would read about George Washington.

I did have one hidden passage, there for a while. There was a time when nobody knew that I cannot operate a turret lathe or automatic screw machine, but the Occupational Questionnaire took care of that. The government now has a description of precisely the kind of work I am doing, together with a handy list of about three hundred things I am no good for. The world doesn't know that much about Einstein or Wordsworth, nor does it care.

That was an eerie little experience, that Occupational Questionnaire. Even after hearing themselves called physical shambles, or 4-F, or over age, or non-essential, or even super-non-deferrable, meaning that their civilian work is surpassed in total uselessness only by palm-reading and horseshoe pitching — even after that, thousands of men will agree it was the Occupational Questionnaire that first put them in their place.

Listed in this humiliating little confession were three

hundred and nineteen occupations regarded as useful and worthwhile. Are you a scarfer? Well, frankly, no. Well, are you a tube bender, a wire drawer, or a hostler, railroader? Are you an internal key-seating machine operator, an upholsterer, a pulpit man, a melter? If you can't do anything in those lines, are you an economist, veterinarian, personnel manager, historian, social worker, or lawyer? Look, we're giving you plenty of chances. Is there nothing you can do?

Well, you couldn't do any of the three hundred and nineteen, the chances are, but along with proving yourself worthless, you were asked to cite a wealth of detail, and describe what on earth you do that keeps you from being a public charge. I finished that examination whimpering like Costello. The part about 'Have you a social security number?' I could answer, and I passed the part about citizenship with flying colors. I could also come forward with a middle name and an address, as requested at the top of the paper. Those were the last questions to which it was possible to give a commendable answer. It reminded me of a time when I wandered into a calculus final instead of Math I for Backward Freshmen who add out loud.

Those papers haven't come back yet, but thousands of us have no doubt at all what our grade is, nor that we are on file somewhere marked 'National drawbacks — shoot in case food runs low.'

What's so good about watch repairers? In showing how to describe your work, that was the model they gave. 'I clean, adjust, and repair watches and clocks,' said Teacher's Pet in the example. 'I take them apart and examine the parts through an eyepiece to find which parts need repair. I repair or replace parts.

Sometimes I make a new part, using a lathe and hand tools. I clean the parts and put them back together again.'

Or just put them back together and *say* you cleaned them, eh, Mac?

Perhaps the unkindest line in this whole admission of ineffectuality, this abject self-criticism of your life work, was the part asking you to name the job for which you are second best fitted, after your own. Once you flunked out on that, too, there was still another space in which to make a third choice, and outline the job for which you are third best suited. This created a feeling that might be described as one of extreme multiple inadequacy or no-earthly-goodness. First you prove you are a war-time liability, then you suggest something you can do even worse.

It would be nice to see how the lawyers described what they do. 'I clean, adjust and repair clients. I take them apart and *nobody* can get them together again.'

But getting back to your letter, chum. After signing the Occupational Questionnaire (and signing seems a little too much to ask) I had to tell how much sugar I owned, and later your orator had to Tell All about the family coffee supply, which wasn't impressive. There must be a dozen agencies, both private and governmental, that know precisely how much rent I pay. Then, of course, there are the Civilian Defense people. They have a perfect picture of the bed situation in my house, so as to know how many refugees could be accommodated, if they weren't too choosy, in the event of an air raid. They also know that I have a bucket, but don't have an axe. ('Axe, hell — he ain't even got a hatchet,' they are saying.) Along with all these other unknown

intimates there is a school teacher who knows the very numbers on my tires. That is something I hadn't told my own mother.

See what I mean, friend? I am as public as a railroad station peanut machine, as exposed as an opened oyster. My every specification is on file somewhere. This is my one chance for reticence. You ask if I have bought my Christmas cards. Pal, I ain't telling.

Three to Get Ready

FOR A LONG time, it was argued, and in his hearing, too, that a young father doesn't make a good soldier. Well, I would hate to come up against him in battle. To begin with, he has had a fine unlovely choice: whether to go, and be a patriot, and possibly a hero, meanwhile being something of a wife-deserter; or to stay, and be somewhere between a good provider and a draft-dodger.

No man wants to desert the bride and the tots; or put it this way, he might enjoy deserting them, a little, but doesn't want to duck his responsibility toward them. (I'm not talking about the lad who can move his children to the townhouse, and march away in an Abercrombie and Fitch uniform. My guy got married on a shoestring, and this is about the year he meant to start saving money.)

There is also the little matter of his age. He's probably in his 30's — a boy at heart, of course, but a little old for war or baseball. The chances seemed strong, as he debated what to do, that he would end up at a desk some place, making him feel like a male auxiliary of

the Wacs, or applying his proven executive ability to the camp garbage disposal.

A man who has been through choices like that must arrive at the battlefront, if he does, in a mood I would not care to meet. Also likely to produce a fine quarrelsome grouch is the kind of thing the draft officials have said about his usefulness, and whether he is worth shooting. It is one thing to be thought expendable. In speaking of fathers, or Dads, as we are called in the headlines, it has been all too clear the authorities regarded any Dad as expended. Never at any time in the discussion was there a newspaper story that said a lot of fine men could be produced by drafting fathers. On the contrary, the authorities talked about it as if it was a cross the armed forces might have to bear, a sad come-down, a last resort. You would think the act of becoming a father put a man on crutches. I think I know why the Generals think that, but I am not chump enough to say so.

'Beggars can't be choosers,' was the tone of these announcements, 'and it is conceivable the country may come to such a pass that it will be necessary to authorize local draft boards to pick out a few of the stronger fathers, and send them along. All preparations have been made for this contingency, for even if it never becomes necessary to rely on these human derelicts, it is our duty to be ready, if such is our bitter cup.

'Of course,' they usually continue, 'the situation is not as black as it may sound, meaning to the military men who will be saddled with this burden. Accepting fathers would not mean that we had to accept all of them. Even if we are scraping the bottom of the manpower barrel, we will have a certain amount of better

material coming in. For one thing, there are a number of lads turning 18 each month, and that group, unmarred by fatherhood, can be counted on to fill the important posts.

‘There are also a certain number of tykes who while only 12 or 13 years old, are tall for their age. In addition, we could always fall back on the Spanish-American war veterans and after that, the Old Settlers. As still another ace in the hole, we could amend the immigration laws.

‘You may be sure that every one of these alternatives has been given serious consideration. No one in any position of authority wishes to burden the armed forces with fathers if it can be helped. Some of us think it might be better to tap the Townsend Clubs, instead, or arm the Brownies and the Sea Scouts. It cannot be expected that many of the fathers can be salvaged; the train ride would prove too much for many of them, while that first night away from home would see them dropping off like flies.’

For all these insults, which ought to put a nice edge on a troubled man, the authorities did throw in one good laugh. That came in an announcement that a man would be given three weeks to get his affairs in shape, just like he has been trying to do for 35 years.

Let’s see: when told to get his affairs in shape, our hero is on his way to borrow on the furniture so he can make a payment on a loan he made to meet a payment on the car the time the insurance premium fell due the same day the rent had to be paid. He had borrowed so much on that insurance policy that it might have been smarter to let it lapse, but this was an intricate question, and he had no time for pretty problems in finance — he

needed dough. As things stand, he will be all right temporarily if he can cash a good-sized check right after the bank closes on Saturday, and then float enough of a loan to cover when the bank opens Monday.

He owes two or three months' pay, here and there, not counting the small debts, like ten dollars he owes at the office, and five he ought to pay to square himself on a dinner check, plus a small tab at a couple of saloons, etc. The only reason he hasn't paid is that the income tax came due, which took the cash he had counted on to have the roof mended. Even so, he would have been in as good financial chaos as usual if it hadn't been for having the clutch fixed on the car.

These are small things; so is an adder. But the point is that if you outlined the average young father's financial structure, as of a given moment, it would make the Insull empire look unimaginative. You would find a tangle that couldn't be straightened out in three weeks by Arthur Andersen and all his auditors. You don't untangle in three weeks a web it took a third of a lifetime to weave.

Someone should pay tribute, incidentally, to a little band of men, many of them fathers, whose determination, endurance, and ability to absorb punishment is a minor epic of this war. I refer to the hundreds who gave the best years of their life trying to get commissions in the Navy.

They spent their days marching from desk to desk, office to office, and their nights filling out blanks and studying mathematics. They have had to ask their friends for letters of recommendation, they have been treated much of the time as if they were gate crashers challenged at the door of the Assembly Ball, and they have sat

across the desk from beardless youngsters to whom they had to be polite, respectful and subservient. A hundred times, studying the man interviewing them, my heroes have stifled the urge to ask, 'How the hell did *you* get in?' But they stifled it, and that takes discipline.

Eventually, there came a day when everything that could be done had been done. Now the candidates spent another small lifetime trying to find out how they stood. Finally, they managed to find the man who could find the man who would know, and then they were told: 'Your application is in Washington.' This line is read with the same finality as saying, 'Your Daddy is in Heaven.' Now there was nothing to do but wait.

Some of these men are not as young as they once were — when they first filed their applications, for instance — but that old step never falters, that old will-power never dies. They were in there trying last week, they are in there trying this week, they will be in there trying next week. And next week, if things are running on schedule, there will be a brand new set of clerks to see, the others having moved on. This more or less means beginning all over again.

It takes a man with sticking power, a man of the bulldog breed. It must give us a Navy as tough as leather. The Army's system of 'procurement and appointment,' meaning 'discouragement and rejection,' was, in the early days of the war, perhaps an even better test of character. It took a man of more than ordinary intelligence simply to find out where to apply. Some of those Army offices were far more elusive than any foe. One day the trail would lead to Major Brown. But it turned out Major Brown's whole department had been abolished and merged with the dehydrated foot-powder

division of the Quartermaster Corps, Heaven only knows why. The man to see currently was said to be Colonel Johnson, who used to be in Room 112 but was now in the process of moving across town. He could be reached by letter, however, if you would address the Office of the Officer in Charge, Office of the Procurement Officer, Office of Officer Procurement. Temporarily, however, Colonel Johnson was not accepting any applications anyway, as he heard unofficially that new orders were forthcoming.

That's the kind of officer I admire — a man who has had to struggle, and knows the Army ropes. Don't give me any of your West Pointers or reserve officers. I honor the man who came up the hard way — the man who went out for a commission and got it.

If too much has been written here about fathers, it is easy to make amends. One of the most interesting figures in the war effort is, it seems certain, not even a married man. I refer to the Unknown Vegetarian who figured out that service men's children could be maintained on \$12 a month for the first child and \$10 for the second.

These figures have since been amended, so that \$30 is allowed for an only child, and \$20 for each additional child. My hero, back from many years spent in the tropics, apparently has been getting reacquainted. Even so, he could have a mighty interesting afternoon if he would take \$20 and go out on a buying spree.

For instance, this optimistic childless repatriate might pick up a little snowsuit, or a winter coat for a girl of ten, or a pair of high-topped boots, or a raincoat just like Daddy's, at \$5 more than Daddy would dare to spend. While out, he might also visit a drug store, as

we call them in this country, and try to kid the druggist out of a small vial of cod liver oil or oil of percomorphum. These things were regarded as poisonous by the tykes of my day, but they are not so regarded by contemporary kiddies, who not only drink the costly stuff, at the price of sound Bourbon, but lick the spoon.

From the drug store the allowance expert might drift over to a toy department, and shop for a few of those trifles that make children so happy. He ought to ask, first, however, as the tots' specifications for things like this are so rigid as to make Army purchasing seem casual. Trifles, I mean, like a little costume dolly, only \$6 plus tax, or a life-size airplane carrier with 30 planes, or a simple set of power-driven tools, or a story-book, at \$5.50, on airplane design. Naturally my spendthrift friend won't be able to find everything there was before the war — the cute little tricycles no longer have two-way radio, for instance — but he can find many war-time substitutes. It is amazing what they have been able to do with non-strategic materials, especially in the way of keeping prices the same.

The way to do it, if the fellow will take a malicious suggestion, is simply to walk into a store dealing in all the things children need, toss ten or twenty dollars on the counter, assuming he can find a clerk, and say 'Shoot the works.' It won't get him much in the way of merchandise, but it ought to get a hearty laugh from any parents who are nearby.

Around the Peace Table:

It Better Be Big

IT WILL be sheer ingratitude of the basest sort if the Merchant Tailors of the United States and Canada are not invited to sit in when peace is made. It is the least that can be done in recognition of their work in designing a Stratosphere Suit, intended, very early in the war effort, to take the strain off of busy executives and conserve the nation's sitting power.

According to a little field manual issued at the time, a pair of zippers, one on either side of the back, would enable the busy executive to loosen the rear panel of his coat and attain the same sitting comfort as would prevail if wearing a jacket with no back in it. Not limited to use at high altitudes, this could also be worn 'for travelling on train trips,' where, as the embattled designers pointed out with real prophecy, 'comfort and relaxation is so important to conserve the energy of executives.'

What this ingenious garment would seem to alleviate is the strain of sitting on one's own coat tail, and while I don't know that any business executive ever bought one,

it is clear that this makes the Nazis, with their vaunted efficiency, look almost slipshod. When you reach that stage in conserving energy, you are figuring things very close indeed. And it might give a fellow just that extra ounce of vigor he needs to face the trying tasks of the morrow, when he must try to make another sixty-five thousand dollars on a cost-plus basis.

This was before the actual opening of hostilities, as I recall it, but even so, the tailors were mobilized. They were forging another secret weapon in the form of the pastel colored dinner coat, and recommended a sash, or cummerbund, in vivacious colors of which mulberry and gold were only two of the more dismaying. This was 'not merely for utilitarian purposes,' either, the announcement said, but to boost the national spirits and, so help me, to express defiance. Right then, it was pretty clear that in our stratosphere suits by day and our defiant sashes by night, we should be ready for anything, or at least, darned cute.

It was the tailors, too, who thought of a way we may always keep our war purposes clearly in mind. This, they said, can be done with the hat. 'Every patriotic American,' said the communiqué, 'should wear a hat as a symbol of our liberty and democracy, as well as an expression of individuality. How many men realize what a rare privilege it is to live in a free democracy where they can wear any variety of hats?'

Here is an aspect of democracy not one citizen in ten has ever given any thought, and don't pretend you have, either. A Fifth Freedom: freedom of hat choice. Personally, I had intended to throw away the limp old Symbol of Liberty I was wearing, but not after the tailors brought home its true significance as a challenge

to Fascism. Who would discard a battle flag like that? And who but a traitor would ever buy a new one?

There is a tobacco company that certainly deserves another of the chairs at the Peace Table. History will show, it seems likely, that when Hitler attempted to pin the Russians down with a skeleton force in the winter of 1942-43, he devoted the precious winter months to a desperate attempt to redesign German cigarettes. Only thus could he counter one of the oddest phases of the war effort, the charge, hurled at him many times daily by one of the tobacco companies, that our cigarettes out-strip his.

This came in the form of spot announcements on the radio, each addressed to one or another of the top Axis leaders.

The day I heard it, a ringing voice suddenly began calling for Keitel, the German general. 'America calling Keitel,' the voice said, and naturally, you perk up your ears, expecting nothing less than a radio-delivered ultimatum.

There is then a short pause, apparently so someone can find Keitel and bring him to the loud-speaker. And then the announcer begins throwing a scare into him.

The announcer greeted the eminent Nazi blood-letter with a snarl that was right out of the gangster movies. 'Lissen, Keittel' he growled, and his voice was so tough that the neighbor's dog got up and slunk off of the steps thirty feet away. Then, as Keitel listened, the sound effects man came on with the sound of a dive-bomber.

American weapons, the announcer went on to tell the German general, are better than ever before. That is because of modern design, it was explained. But there was an odd climax to this transatlantic threat. Just

when Keitel must have been white as a sheet, the announcer began talking about cigarettes. Dive-bombers or cigarettes, the fellow explained, it's all a question of designing. Thus in hardly more than a minute or two, Herr Keitel had been terrorized on the subject of aircraft and tempted with the promise of greater smoking ecstasy.

You may think of Keitel as a pretty tough baby, but I assure you he is no tougher than that announcer's voice, and probably never was spoken to in a tone at once so contemptuous and menacing. The campaign was not limited to Keitel, either. Sometimes they called Goebbels, or Goering, or sometimes Hirohito. Whoever it was, the poor fellow caught plain, unmitigated heck.

The idea, apparently, was to demoralize our enemies by unnerving their leaders — to upset them from the top down. Just how the targets react to this treatment, it would be interesting to know. Having devoted their best efforts for some time to mass-murder and pillage, they may have been cursed before. It seems doubtful, however, if any of them had ever been assailed in a cigarette sales message. If not unnerved, they must at any rate, be puzzled. The very least I expect from the campaign is that the ruthless Mr. Keitel took up smoking.

Then there are the military analysts. I don't know that they have done so much toward winning the war; their contribution is a little hard to assess. But they have certainly made the war beautifully clear. Nothing sounds as cogent, nothing sounds as inevitable, as the experts' analysis of a military operation.

General A, it appears, fainted with his left. By bril-

liant deception, he was able to make General B, his opponent, believe that the bulk of General A's striking power was concentrated in that neighborhood. This was all a hoax, but it deceived General B completely. At considerable trouble, he massed his men to meet the expected assault, whereupon General A, that fox, attacked on the right.

This spun General B's weakened flank around like the spoke of a wheel, and it is a wonder — you get the impression — that in spinning around he didn't spin right into the path of General A's victorious advance. In that case, of course, the victory might have gone to General B, and a fine demonstration of classical tactics would have gone for nought.

By the time General B discovered he had been duped — the losing general is always a remarkably gullible sort, with little or no reconnaissance or intelligence work — it was far too late for him to alter his disposition of troops, and the outcome was never in doubt. He lost as automatically as night follows day, in perfect obedience to the laws of tactics. The winning plan was so clear, so simple, that it is downright amazing it would not also be clear to General B, the loser. But it wasn't, and he misread the situation completely, not tumbling to the plot until he was caught in a thoroughly hopeless position.

At times, the winning general goes through the center. This is a brilliant stroke if it works, and puts the enemy in a terrible spot. Yet there is another brilliant maneuver, mentioned with equal frequency by the analysts, that consists of falling back, in the center, so as to lure the enemy forward into a position of extreme danger. This puts him in an awful jam, for your men

are all about him and, presumably, can cut his advancing units to bits. These two actions seem to make a pair; that is, one seems to be the reverse of the other. Either, however, sounds beautifully clear in the post-battle discussions.

Helping make these stories sound so nicely open-and-shut is the fact that they are never cluttered up with details. Indeed, they sometimes almost fail to mention that either general had an army with him, just to run such errands as storming the pillboxes and capturing the hills. And as for those little accidents that are so decisive in civilian life, they don't get a mention. You never read that General A had the enemy outnumbered five to one or that General B's men were down with an attack of ptomaine poisoning. The weather sometimes gets mentioned, but is rarely credited with a victory. Nor is it ever held up as a possibility that General Von Beedlesnifer, the loser, is a congenital dope, or was having an off day, in which it was all he could do to tell his own right flank from the enemy's water wagons. He is deluded, yes, but only in accordance with the classical rules for being deluded. Nor is it ever suggested that General A won largely because certain of his orders failed to get back to the addressees. No, it was all a battle of wits, very much like chess, except that sixty or eighty thousand fallible amateurs are out there in the dust and the rocks putting the winning plan into execution.

The winner and the loser then have lunch together, while the foot-soldiers move a thousand pieces of artillery to new locations and learn with surprise that the recent wild confusion constituted a victory. It is perhaps just as well they don't know how inevitable that victory was.

Eat Strenuously

IF YOU have been wondering what else you can do to help the war effort you may be surprised to hear that you are helping without knowing it, especially if your table manners are a little offensive and you are something of a boor. I learned this from *Parade*, the weekly newspaper supplement. While a great many odd and trivial things have been hailed as helping win the war, *Parade* was the first, it seems likely, to discover a way to feel patriotic about dirty feeding.

Parade's stories are told in pictures, with words to tell what the people in the pictures are doing, and pictures to prove it. 'Using fingers' is one of the titles in this clarion call to messiness, and the picture shows a well-groomed girl of obvious and determined culture eating a chop. Realizing that these are stern times and call for stern measures, she is holding it in her fingers. It ain't that she doesn't know better. She has simply parted with manners for the duration; she is a dinner-table Commando.

'With point rationing and a shortage of food making it necessary for every housewife to shop with extra care,' says *Parade's* order of the day, 'it's up to the average

citizen to get the most out of his meals, no matter how "etiquette" may have to be altered in the process. Manners must be adaptable to circumstances. The circumstances of today's food supply make it necessary that practicality rather than daintiness should be the new rule. Laying your hands on a chop is no boner now — if you can get a chop to lay your hands on.'

The same rough tactics are advocated for eating soup. Naturally, no matter how tough you are, you can't take your soup in your fingers; what *Parade* means is that you may tilt the soup bowl. 'It's quite polite to get that last drop of soup,' the story declares, 'so that the rest of the meal may be lighter.' This is illustrated with a picture of a couple of girls tilting their soup bowls, just like it says. That this is a deliberate violation by a couple of kids who got plenty class in peace time is shown by the fact that they are spooning out, not in.

Dunking toast is another daring maneuver *Parade* recommends for these topsy-turvy times, and the heck with etiquette. Butter and coffee are not to be wasted, it is explained, 'and it's no crime to get the most out of them.' Just how you get more toast, coffee or butter by dunking the toast is a pretty puzzling angle, but this is no time for quibbling. Still another picture in *Parade's* gallery of rugged eating or patriotic gaucherie shows a modern minute man of the breakfast table boldly squeezing his grapefruit (and the heart of the Citrus Growers' Association) so as to get the last drop of that, too. It was also asserted that it is now all right to mop the dinner plate with a hunk of bread, so as to get the last drop of gravy or other liquids, and damn the torpedoes.

Now here is a way to feel heroic even while eating a

lamb chop, and I don't think gluttony ever was put on a higher plane. There is an alternative to this star-spangled piggishness, of course, simply to eat a little less. Still, that doesn't mobilize the nation's every ounce of gravy, and this does. Nor will it have the same bang in it for men, women and editors who need to feel important even while eating. Personally, I am taking out the dinner bell and replacing it with a bugle, and the next time I sink a piece of toast in my coffee, intend to give myself three rousing cheers. If I burn my mouth, will *Parade* give me a wound stripe?

What next, do you suppose — red, white and blue dinner napkins?

Right on the heels of learning that we might have to sacrifice good table manners in favor of some of our favorite breaches of etiquette (but could take it very big indeed) I learned that my drawers had gone to war. The company still makes them, but the drawers are a war, or austerity, model.

It was only to be expected, and mind you, this is not whining. We have to make many of these sacrifices, whether we notice them or not. The whole world is in a state of flux. Items of everyday life that you might regard as too trifling ever to be missed have marched off to war with the cheers of their manufacturers ringing in our ears. Lucky Strike Green, for one. That means Lucky Strike smokers are asked to smoke cigarettes from a package of totally unfamiliar color. They seem to accept this change, it is nice to see, with a stoic calm that is in striking contrast to the excitement of the makers.

It is a little hard to think of comparable changes, like the revolution in drawers, but you know how it goes.

No pleats on trousers, little or no whipping cream, smaller magazine margins, and so on. You can't pick up a paper without reading where hotels are limiting the number of towels to a customer, the towels you used to have to phone five times to get at all, or that dry cleaners flatly refuse to clean full dress suits, or that the length of household matches has been cut an eighth of an inch. It takes a mighty flexible mind, is what I always say.

Considering all this, it was inevitable that drawers manufacturers could not continue in the same old status quo. Drawers as Usual, is out. But you have to say this for my guy: — he softened the blow with every means in his power, and went to great pains to make sure customers can master the switch-over.

The change consists of using buttons on the waistband. ('And buttonholes,' the card of directions adds; they may have to give you buttons but they don't forget to give you buttonholes to go with them). Formerly there was nothing but a little elastic. This kind of adjusted itself for size; it was automatic. The wearer hardly had to give it a thought. If wide awake enough to pull the panties over his feet, and shrewd enough not to leave them down around his ankles, his underwear worries were over. But that was peace, and this is war.

'Uncle Sam's rubber shortage,' says a card with the new pair, 'is acute. In the interest of winning the war, all rubber must be conserved for use by the armed forces. We have therefore gladly surrendered, for the duration, all use of rubber in these garments. This means an important change in waistband construction.

'You will note that the waistband of this garment is

closed by a button and buttonhole on the right side. Two buttons give you room for a one and a half inch reduction of the waistband.' It appeared for a minute that this meant 'in case things really get tough,' but instead, it refers to making the garment fit. Careful instructions are provided, for the makers don't want their customers sitting around in helpless confusion, trying to puzzle out what on earth to do with a button and buttonholes.

The first step, numbered No. 1, is outlined as follows: 'Button to the button which gives snugness of waistband desired.' I get that, all right. It means you take this here button, and button it. If it is too loose, or too tight, then you unbutton it and try the other button. But what if I can't do it, what if I get my fingers caught in the buttonhole, will Mr. Cooper come and button me?

Instruction No. 2, on the same red, white and blue card tackles the problem of what to do if the shorts don't fit after being laundered. 'If the buttons do not provide sufficient reduction of waistline,' it says, 'remove first button and have it sewn on at a point where sufficient reduction is made possible.' There is an illustration showing a pair of scissors in position to snip off the button, for gents who don't know how a button is removed, and taking one thing with another, it is growing painfully clear that the people who wear my favorite brand of lingerie are not very bright.

Let me see if I've got it, now: if they are too loose, after being washed, then the chances are the waistband is too big for your waist, you sylphlike creature you; a potbellied sylph, too, considered quite a rarity. In that puzzling situation, you take a pair of scissors and snip

the threads of the first button, until the button comes loose and falls to the floor. But do not leave it there, and be mighty careful not to swallow it, either. Instead, you get somebody, preferably somebody with a needle and thread, to sew it back on again. Don't sew it at the same place, though. Sew it at a new place, where it will make the waistband tighter. Should you notice yourself growing red in the face, after this, or unconscious, then the chances are you have moved the button too far.

It may be, of course, that not all the citizens are up to this, and some may have to have their scanties sewed on for the duration. Are there instructions for that?

Should a Lady Thumb, and Other Issues

IN TIMES like these, calling for violent readjustments in almost every branch of life, with the one gleaming exception of my pay, it is reassuring to have such cool heads around as those of Mrs. Emily Post and Mr. Walter Lippmann. The nation's manners couldn't possibly be in better hands than Mrs. Post's, although the problems created by a time of flux are such that a less flexible person would likely blow her well-groomed top trying to rule on them. For instance, take the question of whether an admiral should hold a door for a Wave. Now here is a pretty pickle for fair.

If the admiral is primarily a gentleman, and only secondarily an admiral, and the Wave is primarily a lady, and only secondarily a female salt, or saltess, then obviously it is the gent's duty to hold the door open and let the babe precede him. But if sex has been forgotten, in the grim equality of war, then it is the Wave's duty to hold the door for her superior officer.

As a lifelong reader of Mrs. Post, I claim I got pretty classy manners, but will be frank to admit I couldn't

cope with a dilemma like that. No one wants to forego discipline, and yet no one wants to forego sex, either, including, perhaps, the admiral, eh, Addy? It looks like a stalemate; but it didn't to Em.

Navy men, she said, are so gallant that they would hold the door open no matter what the difference in rank, as long as there was that justly celebrated difference in gender. How many hours of indecision and embarrassment this ruling may have saved can only be conjectured. Here, shaping up, was a social bottleneck of the worst kind. But they don't come too tough for Em. She took that problem and pinned its ears back.

Still another she solved, and here again, she did it before most of us were even awake to the dangerous possibilities, is how a lady hitchhiker should act in relation to the gent from whom she has just bummed a ride to work, because of the gas and tire situation. Obviously, when you give it a little thought, here is a situation that plays hob with the customary rules of conduct.

Here on the corner is a chick who, why if you had so much as honked to her six months ago, she would have cut you cold, being a perfect lady, very hard to pick up.

But now she is standing on the corner in need of transportation to work. Along comes a lad she doesn't know from Adam, never saw before in her life, but his car is empty, so she gives him the thumb.

He pulls over to the curb, throws open the door, and in she gets. So here she is riding along in the privacy of the morning rush hour with a perfect stranger — and maybe it is one of the very cads whose inviting glance and coaxing horn she has turned down flat a dozen times in the past. If that isn't a social breakdown, if that

doesn't throw decorum up for grabs, then I'll put in with you.

Mrs. Post's cool-headed advice was to keep this admittedly informal situation as formal as possible. If the bounder attempts to make conversation, she said, the lady hitchhiker should steer it carefully to the subject of the weather, and keep it there. She will almost be forced to reveal where she is going, of course, and may do so without loss of her good name, but should fend off questions about the nature of her work, in case the cad is also a spy. Exactly how to do this, Mrs. Post left to a girl's own judgment. 'I ain't saying' might do as a hint that this is an improper line of questioning, or something non-committal like 'Mind your own business, nosey,' or etc.

Then back to the weather. It narrows the conversation sharply, just keeping on that one topic, but still and all, it is easy to see Mrs. Post's point. These are strangers, and must act as much like strangers as the facts permit. The one bright spot in a thoroughly difficult situation is that many men will not feel like talking much at that time in the morning, anyway, and the chances are a girl could maintain quite a silence without being thought ill-bred. The thing that surprises me, though, is the way Mrs. Post knocks problems like that right over the fence. The chances are Em don't thumb a ride herself once in a blue moon.

Tough as these tangles are, Mrs. Post can thank her lucky stars she isn't umpiring in the European league. Deciding the correct attitude toward hitchhiking is a lead-pipe cinch compared, for instance, to a little teaser reported from war-torn Vienna, by way of Stockholm.

The mother of twins, the story related, went to the

authorities with a highly unusual tale about their paternity, the twins', not the authorities'. Whereas the boy twin was half non-Aryan, the mother said, the girl twin was 100 per cent Aryan and entitled to be treated as such.

The mother herself is Aryan, her husband non-Aryan. The husband, the lady said, was the father of the half non-Aryan boy twin, all right. But she asserted that the father of the entirely 100 per cent Aryan girl was someone else, and what the story termed a 'pure Aryan,' like the mother herself.

Well, the Viennese Anthropological Society was asked to rule on the case, and handed down a decision that the lady's contention was correct. Sure enough, they said, the boy twin was 50 per cent non-Aryan, just like his mother said, but his twin sister was solid Aryan. Thus the girl twin is only a half-sister to her half-brother, the other twin.

Easily the most interesting character in this fascinating cast, many will say at once, is the mother. The dispatch provided very little information about her, except to say, as I mentioned, that she is 'pure Aryan.' 'Aryan' she may be, if such is the decision of the anthropologists, but 'pure' hardly seems the right modifier.

'Dynamic,' yes. 'Non-partisan, tolerant, well-known and popular,' too.

'Sociable,' certainly, and 'congenial.'

'Hospitable,' would not be an exaggeration, or 'agreeable,' or 'impartial.' Certainly she could be called a very fleet Aryan, and the term 'non-sedentary' would seem deserved, beyond much question. 'Pure,' however, is hardly adequate. That is a little like calling Niagara Falls 'watery' or speaking of mercury as being 'active.'

I don't like to accuse the newspapers of under-reporting, being in the newspaper line myself, but I don't think the heroine of this little vignette has been given the space she deserves. 'Hairbreadth Harriet,' they call her around Vienna.

'What a manager!' they say of her. Why, this kid has a time-table that makes Hitler in his most successful days look shiftless. Never a wasted minute, is our Harriet's motto.

We should know more about her, more about the crowded hours of this most Viennese of Viennese.

I'll bet this programming expert came to court on a motorcycle, and was wearing two wrist watches, each lever-set and adjusted to five positions.

The story has a slightly familiar ring to it, do you get that feeling? But I don't think we have heard it before. Perhaps what makes it sound familiar is that it sounds like a steal from Jerry Colonna.

'Solomon at his sharpest,' says the Chairman of the Vienna Anthropological Society, 'never had to decide a fancier mixup than this one, and I hope the newspapers realize it. Our decision is that the little lady is as guilty as she contends, and that her story about the twins' paternity is true, even though she isn't.'

'Ah, yes,' says our heroine, 'I've been a busy little bee, haven't I?'

The fine thing about having Mr. Lippmann on our team, with the world in upheaval and new ideas to master every day, is that there is no issue too broad for him and no subject too self-explanatory. Mr. Lippmann can take the clearest development of the day, and yet his discussion will be so searching and statesmanlike as to make Mr. Gibbon's six volume analysis of the Roman Empire seem superficial.

Take the subject of gasoline rationing, and the need thereof. Mr. Lippmann can take a thing like that apart in a way to make the Supreme Court on its best day sound like nine schoolgirls. He is the great exponent of Having Things Clear, and would go about it in part as follows, if he will pardon an imitation:

... Automobiles, at least those making use of the internal combustion engine, run on gasoline. Every thoughtful and responsible citizen knows it. It is a view that has also attained acceptance in Washington. Yet it is imperative to make this fundamental fact crystal clear, for right there is the very crux of gasoline rationing. It is not enough to know this in a general way, as you know your own name, or the location of your nose. We must know it deeply. For unless this basic fact is grasped, and grasped hard, gasoline rationing can fail utterly to win popular understanding. Lacking such an understanding, any policy, no matter how wise, will not have the understanding it should.

Rationing by its very name and nature presupposes limitation. Limitation, to the thoughtful, means the imposition of limits. Thus what we have here is a situation in which motorists, needing gasoline if they are to operate their cars, are told precisely how much gasoline they may buy and no more. That amount will be a certain number of gallons per week — four, perhaps, or three, or even one. But it is not enough to understand what a gallon is, and let it go at that. We must also understand what is meant by 'week.' Unless we can bring ourselves to think and think and think some more, until we know with great certainty what this means, then we are not brooding over this problem as we might.

Suppose, on the other hand, that most motorists learn all this. Is that enough? May we then conclude that we see this problem whole, that we have gas rationing, so to speak, on the hip? Not at all. To do so would constitute reckless thinking at its worst.

So far, in this analysis, we have only skimmed over the gist of the situation. We must delve deeper and get at the gist of the gist. That lies in realizing one dazzling truth — that no automobile will run farther than it has gas to carry it. If we comprehend that, we are on the right track. If we don't, we shall find our cars running out of gas and wondering weakly why it happened. We cannot drive without gasoline. There are signs, fortunately, that most everyone knows this. Let us remember that we do. . . .

It is nice to have Mr. Lippmann on duty to think out problems like that, as it leaves a man a little time to brood over the Henry Wallace Case. I'll say this — if ever I saw a man put in his place, it is the Vice President. If Mr. Wallace thinks he can get by with all his loose talk about world peace and a better deal for the common man, he's got another think coming.

The sarcasm, denouncing Mr. Wallace as a dreamer and a visionary, has been flowing like water. Indignation is general. The newspapers write sternly and bitterly about it. 'Mr. Wallace,' writes one columnist acidly, 'rather owes it to the rest of us, the unsophisticated, to give us the names of his associates in this grand scheme to build the world-wide democracy.' As I remember, that came after Mr. Wallace had said we should aim for a better world, but it may have been some wild-eyed talk of his about having peace on earth.

At any rate, Boake Carter was just as upset as the other columnist, that night, and he too administered a stinging rebuke. 'Mr. Wallace,' he said, 'could do a great deal by researching our domestic structure to see if we don't need un-education from mis-information before trying to correctly inform other nations.'

The split infinitive is Mr. Carter's, but the indignant note isn't. Even so, I don't know just what we can do. Mr. Wallace will go right ahead making speeches, and what he'll say next time, Heaven knows. Already he has advanced the idea that children everywhere should have enough to eat, and later this irresponsible idealist began prating about some kind of international effort to preserve peace. More practical souls pretty well scotched his famous 'quart of milk' speech by proving that there are savage strains that do not even like milk (let alone American children who don't get it). But we must not rest on our laurels. The trouble with a fellow like this is that you must be prepared for anything. You can't tell which of the Ten Commandments he may espouse next.

As long as he is Vice President, he can hardly be suppressed, and it doesn't seem likely he can be converted. Can he be impeached? Here is a man who, if not curbed, could commit this country to practical Christianity of the sternest sort. He'll have us — he has actually proposed it — giving our goods to the poor. And this is a situation fraught with dynamite, for those speeches of his get around. Nor will all readers scoff. They will take the Vice President at his word. Some may also think he speaks for the whole country. You know better, and, so do I, but can we expect the same understanding from foreigners? It is a mighty dangerous

pitch. As a bartender of my acquaintance used to say, 'That fellow will give this town a good name.'

Impeachment might be a little embarrassing, in view of the nature of the charges, for about all that could be said is he misrepresents us to the world. Perhaps some other clearcut disavowal would do it — a public statement, maybe, signed by a dozen or so of our leading citizens. 'Our Vice President,' it would say, 'appears to love his fellow man, but please don't take it too seriously. He is a nice fellow, but subject to high ideals. His innate decency gets the better of him. Kindly disregard anything he says that tends to suggest a better world is coming. We are not responsible for any hopes kindled by Henry Wallace.'

I don't know that this should be the exact phrasing; anything will do that makes it absolutely clear Mr. Wallace speaks only for himself. His unselfish code, it will have to be explained, by no means represents typical American opinion on the subject. It may be a little hard to do, it may even now be too late, although I don't seriously think that. Too many of the citizens are awake to the danger, and hopping mad.

When that is cleared up, I wish someone, black reactionary or Communist, would sit down with me and clear up a case that might be called 'The Case of the Communist's Two Grand.' This has been puzzling me, off and on, every since Earl Browder, the Communist leader, was thrown into prison. You may remember that Comrade Browder was released, on the theory that fourteen years was too long to serve for the crime in question, which was travelling on fake passports. The stories about his release made me feel very, very lonesome, like civilization's orphan. What did it was a line explaining that Comrade Browder was fined two thousand dollars,

and paid it. If he did so in the nickels and dimes of exploited working people, the stories didn't say so, and no reporter would miss an angle like that. The only thing to conclude, consequently, is that Browder reached down into his jeans, hauled out a roll, stripped off two thousand dollars and laid it on the line.

I should explain that word 'jeans.' It is a term meaning 'pants,' used by us working stiffs, and by working stiffs, in the future, I mean us white-collar working stiffs. Who else?

Here is this crusading friend of the downtrodden, caught in the cruel grasp of a hostile legal system, with all the cards stacked against him. They slap a fine on him. It's a lot of money. Where on earth can he get it? Why, in his pocket. That lets me down. I thought a Communist leader would be ashamed to have two thousand dollars. What is this, the Long Island set of Communists, the station-wagon crowd? How do they tell themselves from capitalists? And where does a fellow go if he hasn't got that kind of money? Is there a Junior Chamber of Communism, for young fellows who are only starting out? Do they take any members on social standing or intellectual attainments alone, or is money everything?

What we have here is a situation in which a capitalistic nation makes two thousand dollars by slapping a capital levy on an enemy of private property, and the defendant promptly pays off with a punctilio that would have delighted the late Andrew Mellon. There, I submit, is as confusing a round as has been fought in the class struggle for many a year.

Is this the new level of the revolution? Is a Communist now a man who wants to overthrow capitalism even if it costs him a couple of thousand dollars?

You'll Love It Here

MY VACATION PLANS are all made, and I recommend them to other white-collar workers who want a rest from the studied neglect they have experienced all these years down at the office. I am going to spend my vacation in one of the factories whose help-wanted ads list the advantages of letting their firm hire you.

Is there music while you work? Of course there is music while you work, and if you don't like it, just tell the foreman and we will shoot the orchestra conductor.

The work is light, the surroundings are cheerful and pleasant, and you will be working with a peach of a bunch of kids, too. Do you need experience? Why shucks, no, lambie. You just come on out here, all ignorant as you are, and our kind, sweet-natured old instructors will train you while you are listening to the mood music.

Did I mention that we will pay you while you learn? Sure we will, and glad to do it. The paymaster is sitting over there in the corner biting his fingernails to the knuckle, and crying like a baby over this policy, but don't you pay any attention to him. If he gets on your nerves, blubbering like that, we'll put a tarpaulin over

him. Sure, we pay while you learn, and furthermore, after you have been here one month, we give you a paid vacation. We may feel it is necessary to swear out a warrant for you, at the same time, just to make sure you don't run away from us, but we give you the vacation, all right.

I had one of these ads that was a third of a column long, with that entire space devoted to a catalogue of the factory's attractions. Special emphasis was given the food. The food is not only good, but just to prove it, the management went into detail about the pie that is served. It is an inch and a half thick, if memory serves, and the management positively guarantees, in writing, that the crust will be flaky.

How's the pay? Why, charming, like everything else in this industrialized picnic ground. You make good money to start with, they buy you four or five kinds of insurance, there is plenty of overtime, advancement is assured, raises are automatic, and there is a bonus at Christmas. In nice clean new bills, no doubt.

You wouldn't be wasting your time, either, love, for as is almost customary these days, the would-be employer swears that his plant has bright postwar possibilities and a rosy future.

In addition, I believe they said that this little Eldorado is close to transportation, and if you are at all nervous about working late at night, the superintendent will walk home with you.

That is the mood beautiful, that is precisely the mood many of us have always wanted to find in an employer, especially our own. If the company in question will send me a photograph of the principal executives, and guarantee me a lathe on the south side of the building,

with a pleasant view, I will appreciate it. It's not my line of work, and I am not going to clutter up their place with another head to train, but would like to have the material to show my own employers how sweet management can be if only it is desperate.

Amid all this unnatural benevolence, it was like old times to read about labor relations in the Malayan snake farms. The dope came from one of those cartoons dealing in the incredible. 'Some Malayan snake farms,' the legend said, 'fine any attendant who allows the deadly cobra to strike him. The venom, used as snake bite serum, is too valuable to waste.'

. . . Smithers, the boss says, I'm a patient man. I try to go along with the help. Anything they want, except money, why I try to give it to them. You couldn't ask for a fairer, kinder, more considerate boss than I am, now could you?

O.K.

But it comes to my attention, Smithers, that you have been letting those snakes bite you again. Oh, don't bother to deny it—we saw you. If you didn't, then what are you doing in that condition? You got snake-bite written all over you, Smithers. If I ever saw a man that had been bitten by a cobra, it's you.

If you were new here, Smithers, there would be some excuse for this sort of thing. We never object when it's one of the young fellows. They're green, they aren't used to handling cobras, and they will occasionally get bitten. That costs us a certain amount of venom, but we have to expect it. In fact, we have a provision for that set up on our books.

But you, Smithers—you're not new around here. You been here for years. You know them snakes, and

you know they are touchy. That one you let bite you will be no good for a week now. You got him all excited and nervous and furthermore, Smithers, you are not on his diet and you know it.

Don't stand there looking so healthy, either. That is Grade A cobra venom you got in you, and the least you could do, in simple appreciation, is to sink into a coma.

I'm not going to let you go, Smithers, because the way things are it is pretty hard to get anybody these days, and I wish you would remember it. By the time I get a man, and get him trained, he either goes some place else or what happens? — he gets himself bitten and dies. If you knew some of the trouble the management goes through, Smithers, to keep this place running, you would show a little gratitude for some of the things that are done for you around here, instead of wasting our most expensive venom. Do you realize how hard I work to get somebody to work here? I don't know what's the matter with people these days. Here I got the most modern, up-to-date snake pit in Malaya. Free medical treatment, the best snakes money can buy, pleasant surroundings, a company bowling team — everything your heart desires. The least I could expect is a little coöperation. But you, Smithers, you go get bit by the best cobra I've got in the house.

As I say, I'm not going to fire you. Is this the first time it's happened? Never mind — I suppose you would say it is, even if it isn't, and I haven't got time to be looking up any records. I'm going to let you off this time with a warning. But I warn you, Smithers — one more bite and you're through. We don't keep those snakes for the benefit of the help. Kindly remember that, Smithers — we're not in business for our health.

That'll be all now — go back and see if you can behave yourself. I'm going to dock you for the venom, but I'll give it to you wholesale. Go back to your snakes, Smithers. I'm giving you another chance.

The Crisis in Seating

UNLESS you read the same poignant piece in the *New York Times* that I did, you can't possibly imagine the breath-taking problems in protocol that arise these days in Washington. The dirty truth is that this war is playing hob with dinner parties.

Just where to seat the Peruvian minister, in relation to the wife of a Lend-Lease official, is never an easy question, but according to the *Times*, the war has complicated an already complex situation by bringing in a lot of strategic and important ladies and gents whose exact social rating cannot well be determined. T. V. Soong was cited as an example. Mr. Soong arrived in Washington on an unofficial visit. He is the Chinese foreign minister, but cannot be treated as an accredited envoy unless he is working at it. Whether Mr. Soong is official or unofficial might make a difference of two or three places at the dinner table. The problem, when he arrives unofficially, is to give him a place of honor, and yet snub him, delicately, for not being present officially.

There is also the Archduke Otto. Otto is pretender to the throne of Austria. As pretender he would be entitled to a very good seat, indeed. But what turns a

protocol expert's hair a pretty grey, the *Times* explains, is that Otto's pretensions are not recognized by our State Department. This makes Otto an unrecognized pretender to a non-existent or closed-out throne, and a social problem child for fair. He cannot be treated as a real or official pretender would be treated, but only as a would-be pretender would be treated. Otto's status, so to speak, is that of an honored and illustrious bum. Well, deciding where to feed characters as evanescent as all that obviously takes a social Einstein. Mamie, it's murder.

The *Times* told of one tense moment when it looked as if Senator Connally and Representative Sol Bloom could get fair treatment only by sitting in each other's lap, and another crisis when Prime Minister Churchill and President Benes of Czechoslovakia all but appeared at the same dinner, which would have produced such a clash of social priorities that somebody in the State Department undoubtedly would have had to commit expiatory suicide, probably by strangling himself with a white tie.

The Connally-Bloom imbroglio arose when a luncheon was given for Madame Chiang Kai-shek. There was not one host, but two, and they were multiple — the foreign affairs committee of the Senate, the same of the House. To louse things up even further, there was considerable vagueness over just what status the guest of honor enjoyed. She was not at that time the wife of the head of a nation, except in fact. She was merely the wife of the Generalissimo.

The experts at first put Senator Connally at the head of the table, Representative Bloom at the foot, but so many dignitaries wished to attend that the twin hosts

were clearly in danger of being asked to wait for the second table. So, a scant twenty minutes before time to eat, the experts recklessly threw all the rules to the wind. Senator Connally was seated in the center, on one side, with Representative Bloom just opposite. Mrs. Roosevelt was seated to the Senator's right, Madame Chiang to his left. Flanking Representative Bloom were Vice-President Wallace and the Chinese ambassador. The spot at the foot of the table, or deep left field as things had been arranged, went to Sumner Welles. He was then Acting Secretary of State, but only acting, and was therefore ranked by the real or non-acting Cabinet members. Bold as the experiment seems to have been, judging from the *Times'* surprise, it let the two chairmen eat with their guests.

No improvising, however daring, seemed likely to solve the Churchill-Benes dilemma. The White House was giving a state dinner for President Benes when Churchill flew in. If Churchill attended President Benes' dinner, who would sit at President Roosevelt's right? There was absolutely nothing in the books to cover the case, apparently, and the protocol experts were at their wits' end. It could have been a shambles, you will readily understand, except that just in the nick of time, the Prime Minister saved the day by a simple though imaginative decision. In a master stroke very few Washington guests seem to think of, the Prime Minister stayed home. He ate his supper at the British embassy.

Things actually have grown so tough, the *Times'* story went on, that many hostesses in our war-torn capital are going to the extreme of holding informal parties, where the rules do not apply. 'Informality has been

fashionable here,' the story said in one of the driest lines ever written, 'since shortly after Pearl Harbor.'

The trouble, or so it seems to me, lies in trying to get the guests around the same table. The Union Oil Company of Los Angeles solves its own caste problem much more adroitly, according to a story in the magazine, *American Business*, by using three types of desks.

'Union Oil Company,' says *American Business*, 'standardized on three sizes of desks: executive, junior executive, and clerical. . . . About seven hundred new desks are now in use at Union Oil, all twenty-nine inches high.'

Just how the three types differ, the story doesn't make clear, and this would be interesting, too, inasmuch as all three are the same height. What I prefer to think is that the junior executives' desks are exactly like the executive model except that there are Mother Goose characters on them. On the other hand, the junior executives' relative insignificance may be expressed in the accessories. The junior model, for instance, may have a water jug but no glass, which would help keep the occupant in his place, or it may have push buttons that are not connected, or perhaps the inter-office communication system, in desks of this class, receive only incoming messages.

As for the clerical desks, it is easy to visualize those. Plain unpainted pine, and if you don't like the splinters, bring your own sandpaper.

Far more interesting, however, is the way Union Oil cracks the problem of getting a stenographer close enough to hear without being so close as to disrupt thinking about Union Oil. 'Desks of all employees who dictate considerably,' the story says, 'have a knee well

for the stenographer, who can thus sit up close to the desk, in a comfortable and correct posture. A panel, midway in the knee well, separates the stenographer's knee well from the knee well for the person regularly using the desk.'

Thus, in the Little Daisy No Footie Playing in Business Hours Model, the stenographer's knees are not only concealed but barricaded. What do they do with the clerks, tape their eyes?

Great Day in the Morning

Y ou don't have to be the seventh son of a seventh son to suspect that the status of the adult male, after this war, is not going to be what it has been. Certainly it won't bear much resemblance to the place he occupied in society before the war. Personally, I can't see much in store for him except running for public office, committing certain felonies impossible for women to perform, and catching ballet dancers. The dolls are taking over everything else, and doing it with considerable skill, I must say (but don't believe).

Almost every day brings some new example of how the women are mastering some highly technical trade or craft, or learning some knack always regarded as a purely masculine accomplishment. A common photographic pose shows a group of lady mechanics studying the ins and outs of the automobile, for instance. And they are not learning merely where to look for the fan belt or how to clean a spark plug. The fact of the matter is, they are learning more about the anatomy of automobiles than their husbands even pretend to know.

'None of these babes can be graduated from this class in advance automotive engineering,' it will be ex-

plained, 'until she can rebuild the distributor of a 10-ton moving van under shellfire in a heavy rain.

'A favorite stunt on the part of the instructress is to hold examinations in which the girls are required to take a Diesel engine apart blindfolded in a blackout. In the picture above, the 16-year-old subdeb at the left is welding a broken crankcase over an open fire while her companion retreads the tires and corrects the cylinders to fire in three-quarters time.

'Later, before they are granted their certificates, each girl will grind a set of valves while looking in the other direction and haul a load of gray iron castings from Denver to Sacramento in reverse gear.'

Another common photograph shows a group of efficient looking lasses at work in machine shops, usually standing in front of a mechanical monster that looks as if it would baffle Ralph Kettering himself. 'While only eighteen,' the words will explain, 'Betty is doing the work of four expert machinists. In the picture above, she is operating a ten-ton hydraulic gear cutter with which she will machine a four-hundred-pound block of alloy steel to a tolerance of three ten-thousandths of an inch. Betty is one of three sisters, all mechanically expert. Alice, the older sister, is a boilermaker in Lafayette, Ind., while Connie, the kid of the family, was the excavating contractor for Boulder Dam.

'Betty goes with an unemployed auto salesman whose parents have said they may marry when Betty gets to be a chief machinist at one hundred and three dollars and ninety cents a week.'

Now it's obvious that, for better or for worse, the standing of men is not going to be the same in a post-war world full of women as proficient as all that. And

even if the women now holding men's jobs don't keep them, after the war, it seems inevitable that they will learn too much for anyone's good.

In the days of women's industrial innocence, women frequently had little understanding of their husband's work and while they knew instinctively that it couldn't be very important they did not have detailed evidence. 'I don't know just what it is Thurman does,' you would hear a wife say, 'but I know that it is extremely tiring and keeps him under a constant nervous strain. Highly technical, too, he tells me.'

This did a husband no harm. In fact, it was his shield and buckler, it gave him a little standing in the home. 'I had a hell of a day,' he could say as he dragged himself across the threshold. 'Kindly keep the children quiet and let me have my dinner on a tray. Along about four-fifteen this afternoon we ran out of the concentrated silurgium and couldn't find any this side of Nantucket, where the big silurgium deposits are. I don't know how I stand this. I was on the verge of resigning this afternoon, but the board of directors came over in a body and begged me to see them through, so I stayed. Along with that, one of the cross-ventilated habilizers broke down and I had to fix it personally. Nobody seems to do any work around there but me.'

But if his helpmeet has spent a year or so in the same kind of work, or the same office, these accounts of the day's battle will have to be edited a little toward the side of realism. They will be subject to strict interpretation and may not evoke the sympathy produced in the past.

'Why didn't the mechanical superintendent fix the habilizer?' the wife is likely to ask. 'He always did when I worked there. And what is this nonsense about silur-

gium? All we ever used was a little laundry soap. Furthermore, I could always make it home in forty-seven minutes whereas it seems to take you an hour and a half. Why is that?’

No, this new insight into working conditions is not going to make for domestic harmony. On the contrary, it will put one more strain on married bliss, and there is no assurance that marriage can stand it.

Along with knowing far too much about manufacturing processes, women with experience in war plants will know altogether too much about pay and advancement. Husbands lost ground enough when they let their wives learn what payday is. In the future, far too many lasses will know exactly what a man should be making, what he would have to do to make more, and if he doesn't get ahead very fast, will know why. This is likely to work wonders with our mounting divorce rate.

It may be this view is altogether too pessimistic. It may be that serving a term as her husband's replacement will give a girl a new appreciation of what a man goes through, of the curious character of employers, of the odd happenstances that can thwart a promising career. Hearing about the beautiful pay that is to be made in war plants, and then discovering that those figures are for a toolmaker working nights in a dynamite factory, may be both educational and mellowing. The girl who has worked long and hard for thirty-six dollars and fifty cents a week, and is laid off a week for being absent a day, may end up thinking of her husband as both rugged and industrious. She might even come to think of the poor wight as something of a hero. About time, too.

On the other hand, if women choose to stay in their

jobs, there is little a gentleman can do about it. It is one thing to woo some luscious young switchwoman or bartendress and marry her, but it is something else to deprive her of her job. If she likes this kind of work, only a cad would take a job away from a woman. A little light brain-work may be all that is in store for men. It is a prospect the adult male will face bravely. We are too pretty to work anyway.

Besides that, there are several little treats I want to allow myself, after the war, one of which is to ride on the French Line's ships and watch them slay a lobster. I came across a description of this in an ad from *Fortune* magazine, dated 1931, and friends, this little pageant makes sun-worship seem brief and unimpressive.

'This is a true picture of a lobster,' the ad begins. 'He looks unusual. By all standards of art and flavor, he is. But passengers who have crossed on the France know him well.

'Only this morning he was alive and pugnacious, in a saltwater aquarium on board. He was snapped out of it. He was boiled.'

(There, sonny, is a little lesson for us all. He was feeling pretty good. He was alive and pugnacious. He was alert and aggressive. 'Pull yourself together,' they said to him. 'I'm in fine shape now,' he said. And he was right. So, in reward, they boiled him.)

You would think the lobster liked it, from the way the description continues.

'They mounted on a rock on a silver platter his empty vermilion shell; the meat of him was minced fine and contrived into canapés. Each canapé was then spread with canary-yellow mayonnaise, and on that a mischievous pattern was spotted in truffle.'

Do they stop at that? Not by a damned sight.

'Each canapé,' the story goes on, 'was thereupon mounted on a silver skewer, and stuck in the back of the lobster-rampant. The whole was frosted with sea-spray jelly, to make him look just out of the water, and the triumphant result was served to a table of four.'

I was confident that the next paragraph would tell how the chef, having achieved this triumph, kills himself to preserve the secret, but it turns out the table of four isn't even supposed to like it much.

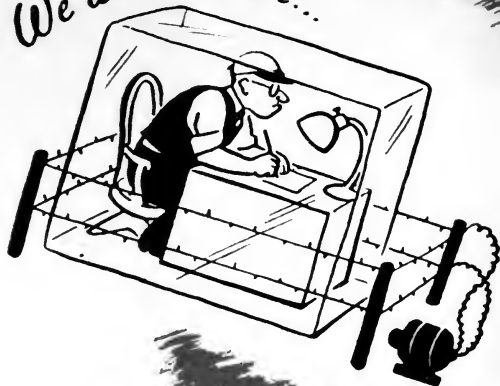
'For what?' the story goes on.

'As an hors d'oeuvre, merely — an incidental appetizer for another typical French Line luncheon. Were these favored passengers, then? No — except as all passengers on the French Line are favored passengers. They just happened to feel lobsterish, so the chef gratified that feeling with a typical French difference . . . What the chef did with the lobster, the chief steward was doing in his own department to make each guest enjoy himself a little more. So was the smokers-room steward, so was the cabin steward, so even was the tiny "groom" who runs errands. . . .'

Our boiled and minced friend, the pugnacious lobster, apparently came through his harrowing experience in good shape, for the ad closes on this note: 'This lobster, then, begs you to accept his invitation.' Right after the war, I hope to take him up on that, some day when I am feeling lobsterish.

In will come the canapé, on a silver skewer, frosted in sea-spray jelly. The mayonnaise is canary-colored, all right, and on that canary-colored mayonnaise is a pattern made of truffle. The moment I dream of is the time when I can rise, yawn, point to the truffle with real

We were frozen...



Come live with me...

Photographers walk right in



Love At First Flight

BY CHARLES SPALDING
AND OTIS CARNEY

'Where are you going?' my instructor asked.

'I'm up for my solo, sir,' I said.

The path had not been easy. It bristled with obstacles; two years of college math, mastery of a bucking Link Trainer, a steady stomach during the snap-roll, and, in general, ability to distinguish a plane from a yo-yo. The Anacostia Naval Base, where Dowd learned to fly, is appropriately situated, he recalls, 'between the Potomac River and a mental hospital. In my day we graduated some men both to right and to left.' When Dowd returned from his first solo flight, they sent for the crash truck. Soon after, he landed in an Admiral's back yard. But those were just the beginning of his adventures. Ensign Dowd's pursuit of his wings makes up the most hilarious book yet to appear in uniform.



degrees Fahrenheit

cummerbund





Mr. Publisher!

A realistic account of my life and times would have you sleeping like a baby inside of 200 words. It would also make me suffer in comparison with other authors whose careers would wear out Lawrence of Arabia and make Cellini look like a clod. Usually they began writing after working successively as steeplejack, test pilot, band leader, hobo, and cab driver. Even their hobbies are distinctive, like falconry or iceboat racing or something that makes good, if slightly preposterous, copy.

So fix me up one of those — a life with a belt in the back. Just say that I am a colorful but mysterious adventurer who went to sea at the age of four and soon afterwards became chief of a band of Tasmanian gun-runners. You know, first man to climb Everest with holes in his shoes, etc. Say that this intriguing figure with the curly hair and the C card found bull-fighting too tame for his restless spirit, etc. Say that outside of having two Albino wives and a pet whale he is one of the finest fellows you ever met, just a super guy — whom his colleagues on the *Chicago Daily News* still think of as the wonder-boy from Gibson City, Ill., who got educated somehow covering night police for the Decatur *Herald*.

Robert M. Yoder